

Tests

SET-TOP BOXES
MOBILE PHONES
MICROWAVE OVENS
IRONS
SECATEURS
COLUMN HEATERS

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers



SMOKE ALARMS

The best kind to buy

TARGETING KIDS

Watch out for food promos

HOW OLD IS THAT OJ?

Probably older than you think

COMING SOON ...

Double strollers

Convenient or
cumbersome?



Protein bars

Might as well eat chocolate?



Dishwashers

Finding a good all-rounder.



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Your kids in the firing line

CHOICE isn't the first organisation to expose some of the tactics used in marketing unhealthy food to children, and we expect the groundswell against it will only grow bigger in future.

The article on page 12 looks at some of the more 21st century techniques used in the subliminal sell: branded advergames on the internet, product e-cards for kids to email to their friends, cyber games packed with product placement, and good old viral marketing, to name a few. Food companies are certainly benefiting from the fact that online marketing isn't currently subject to the voluntary code of practice for advertising to children, which only covers print, TV and radio advertising.

A major part of the problem is that the majority of the advertised foods are high in fat, salt and/or sugar, and are contributing to the spread of childhood obesity that's finally being recognised as a significant threat to their future health. And it seems to be of little consequence to marketers whether what they're pushing is healthy or not.

For example, on a web resource for marketers to young children we found the following message for those targeting the kids' chocolate market: "The first rule to break here is 'don't play with your food'. Any way you can find to make the chocolate treat into a toy will be a positive step!"

It's unconscionable from a health point of view, and many people also find it a cynical exploitation of young children's inability to work out what's a promotion and what isn't. CHOICE is calling not only for the food marketers to clean up their act but for the government to do its bit too, and take action to regulate food promotion to children in all its forms.



Jane Mackenzie
Editor

www.CHOICEextra.com.au



This is a free website for CHOICE magazine subscribers. It's an index of CHOICE articles going back to Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs of many of them so you can read them immediately, without having to go and find your issue of CHOICE.

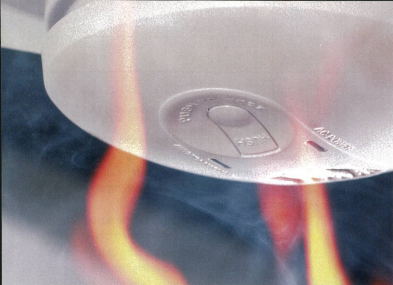
To use this website you need to log in with your subscriber number, which is the number directly above your name on the mailing label that comes with the magazine.

If you see the  symbol in a magazine article it means there's extra information on [choiceextra](http://choiceextra.com.au) that we couldn't fit into the magazine.



Call 1300 360 655

All you need is the model name and number you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine). CHOICE Shopper is available to personal subscribers only, and you can use it to buy major laundry, kitchen and home entertainment appliances, cameras and computers (all costing over \$100) and cars (over \$10,000).



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Photo: Gene Ross

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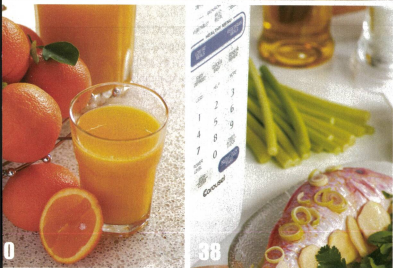
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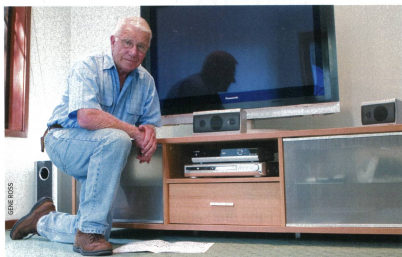
CHOICE PRICE RISE

Due to increasing costs, the price of a CHOICE subscription is going up. The new prices, effective from the August 2006 issue, will be:

- Personal subscribers: quarterly \$18.50, one year \$74, two years \$137.
- Institution/company: one year \$118, two years \$225.
- CHOICE and CHOICE Online: quarterly \$29.
- Upgrade to CHOICE plus CHOICE Online if you're already a CHOICE subscriber: \$10.50/qr.
- If you've subscribed to CHOICE magazine within the last year, the price you pay will be held constant for your first year.

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ARE YOU READY TO ASSEMBLE?

Dick Chadwick couldn't believe his eyes when he turned up at his partner's place one night and saw that the entertainment unit they'd bought had been delivered. Rather than looking at a substantial timber cabinet with glass doors — as displayed in the shop — he found two large cardboard boxes containing some 200 components for assembly at home.

Although they'd "absolutely no idea" at the time of purchase that they were buying a kit that required assembly, Dick didn't send the unit back. It had taken them a while to find one suitable to house all their electronic gear, including the large TV they'd just bought. And after all, Dick is a professional engineer and thought it couldn't be that hard to put it together himself. But it was.

"It took me 7½ hours to assemble the unit, and I worked as fast as I could," Dick said. And for about half that time, the assembly process required two people — fortunately his partner had enough strength to lend a hand. A second time round he could probably put it together much faster, but inexperience meant the job was time-consuming.

Afterwards, talking to friends and family members, Dick found they'd had similar experiences, as the practice of selling furniture in kit form seems quite widespread. So he'd like to alert fellow consumers to always check before you buy.

"I consider it highly misleading for a store to sell such an article without a clear indication that complex installation is required, and that help is essential. I can readily imagine that people who are elderly and/or infirm or alone — or just not good at this sort of thing — would find assembly impossible or, at the very least, very difficult," Dick said.

We agree, and so does the NSW Office of Fair Trading, which confirmed that furniture sold in kit form that requires assembly at home should be marked accordingly in the store (or in a catalogue). If it's not declared anywhere that the piece requires assembly, the advertisement or display is considered misleading, and you're entitled to complain about it.

Of course, you could refuse to accept delivery and request a refund, but that's hardly a satisfactory solution if you're eagerly awaiting the item. So to avoid disappointment on delivery, always check before you buy whether it's 'fully assembled' or for self-assembly at home. And make sure you understand the label language — one store we contacted uses the term 'RTA', meaning 'ready to assemble'; less ambiguous labels would be more useful, such as 'requires assembly'.

An end to nuisance calls?

In case you didn't hear the good news when the Minister announced it a couple of months ago, we're finally getting a national, legislated 'Do Not Call' register you can put your name on to avoid receiving unsolicited telemarketing calls.

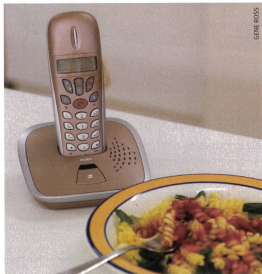
"The number of unsolicited calls in Australia has grown significantly in recent years and has led to rising community concerns about the inconvenience and intrusiveness of telemarketing," the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Helen Coonan, said.

The register will apply to all telemarketers operating in Australia and also those overseas representing Australian companies. It's expected to be up and running in 2007. Charity groups and people undertaking social research will be exempt from the proposed legislation, as well as companies calling consumers with whom they have an existing business relationship.

The legislation will also establish national minimum contact standards that telemarketers must maintain, covering permitted calling hours, minimum information requirements and termination of calls.

The Australian Direct Marketing Association (ADMA) welcomes the proposal that'll require all Australian companies to follow the standards that only its members are currently required to adhere to. (ADMA's 'Do Not Call' register only applies to ADMA member companies.)

CHOICE, too, welcomes the move to protect people from unsolicited telemarketing calls. However, we think it'll need to be monitored carefully and if it proves ineffective, amended to an opt-in system, where people would register for telemarketing contact. As a bonus, such a scheme would be both easier and cheaper to manage, as it would be based on a smaller database.



Youth, debt and mobiles

The pressure from advertising to have the latest of everything, coupled with poor financial skills, a 'buy now pay later' mentality and easy access to credit, have seen rising numbers of Gen-Ys in debt. Financial counsellors say under 25s with debts of \$20,000–\$30,000 are not unusual. Some are even forced into bankruptcy.

Mobile phones are major causes of debt here. In a 2003 study of people seeking counselling for debt problems, 34% of the 18–24 group listed their phone as one of their biggest debts. Another study of youth debt commissioned by the NSW Office of Fair Trading found 35% of under-18s cited mobile phones as their largest source of debt.

Mobiles are young people's preferred method of communication, and the costs of calling, texting and sending photos multiply quickly. Add the cost of using premium '19' numbers to personalise mobiles with ringtones and wallpaper or join in TV voting and so on, and we're talking serious money.

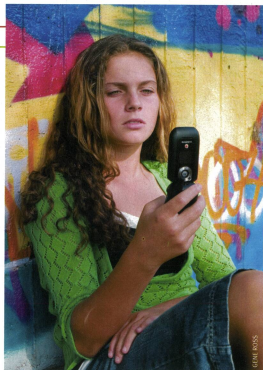
Credit agency Baycorp Advantage says 20% of those listed as a credit risk by their telecommunications company are under 25. A bad credit rating of as little as \$100 can leave the defaulter unable to obtain credit for five years.

Experts say mobile users get into trouble because they can't keep track of what they're spending. Some telecommunication companies are trying to address this. 3 has a feature that allows customers to check their account throughout the month. VODAFONE has one plan where a text message is sent monthly to the user when they've reached their nominated spending limit. Users can also check their bill online at any time. TELSTRA says

it calls customers if their spending is abnormally higher than usual. While it's a good start, debt experts say these kinds of tools need to be heavily promoted to customers to be truly useful.

Some companies also recommend capped deals, where you get a certain value of calls for a fixed dollar amount per month (which you pay regardless of whether you make that value of calls). However, you can still make calls at extra cost once you've reached your limit. Financial counsellors say until these deals are hard-capped — that is, you're absolutely unable to spend more than your limit — there's still the risk of overspending. They also need to be widely advertised, with no complicated contracts. TELSTRA has a hard cap of \$550 per month for premium-service numbers — far too high an amount to keep young people out of debt.

Parents can help their children avoid debt by advising them to buy prepaid and ask their phone provider to block access to '19' numbers. The Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association (AMTA) also publishes tips on managing mobile phone spending — go to www.amta.org.au and click on 'consumer tips' on the left-hand side of the page.



ADVISERS FAIL ASIC SURVEY

A recent shadow shop by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) found significant flaws in the quality of superannuation advice provided to consumers. Unreasonable or inappropriate super advice is likely to have a major impact on retirement benefits.

The survey assessed over 300 examples of advice consumers received about their super. It found:

- 16% of advice wasn't reasonable, given the needs of the consumer.
- In a third of the cases where the consumer received advice to switch funds, the advice lacked credible reasons and

risked leaving the consumer worse off.

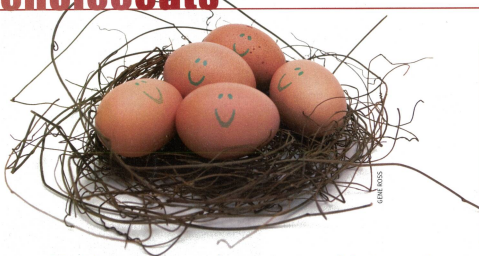
- Unreasonable advice was three to six times more common if the adviser had a conflict of interest, such as receiving a commission or bonus if the advice was followed.

Common problems included:

- Advisers not investigating the current fund before recommending a new fund.
- Advisers overlooking insurance features of an existing super fund.
- Statements of Advice not adequately disclosing the reason for the advice.
- Statements of Advice not adequately disclosing the consequences of switching funds.

CHOICE shadow shops of financial planners in 1995, 1998 and 2003 found conflicts of interest were a major problem. This latest survey shows that conflicts of interest such as commissions are still undermining the quality of financial advice. In particular, advice about switching super funds is still heavily influenced by commission-based selling practices.

CHOICE is asking the Federal Government to give ASIC wider powers to control or prohibit conflicts of interest, so as to properly protect people's retirement incomes.



Making sense of compound interest

Earning compound interest is one of the basic ways of building up a nest egg. For investors, compound interest means investing money and then reinvesting the interest you earn, so you're earning interest on your interest. But it can be difficult to work out how much you can expect to earn.

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) has created an online compound interest calculator to do it for you.

The calculator lets you enter different amounts to work out what your money will be worth if you invest and reinvest all the interest you earn, how much you need to start with to reach your target amount, how long it will take, what interest rate you need and what the effect is of making regular investments compared with a single lump sum.

The calculator can also convert a daily, weekly or monthly interest rate to an annual rate, or vice versa, to make comparisons easier.

You can find the calculator at ASIC's consumer website, www.fido.gov.au, along with other calculators that let you look at such things as the value of super, managed funds and pension investments.

CHOICE Online also has a free savings calculator — go to www.choice.com.au/money and click on 'savings calculator' in the 'Tools' box.

CLARIFICATION

THE HARD WORD

CHOICE, April 2006

In *The Hard Word* we published a photo of a handwritten sign with the words: "LOANS. Don't Get Ripped Off Elsewhere. Come Here." However, a fixed sign for Knott and Associates was also shown in the photo. CHOICE retracts any implication that Knott and Associates had a connection with the handwritten sign; there was no intention to suggest they did.

CORRECTION

DVD/HARD DISC RECORDERS

CHOICE, May 2006

In the 'Video connections' table on page 23 it said 'DVI in'; this should be 'DV in'. The text on the same page should have read:

"DV (digital video, also known as firewire) is often used to connect a digital camcorder."

POCKET MUSIC

CHOICE, April 2006

The COWON iAudio X5L can be recharged using a USB connection, which wasn't indicated in the table on page 12. After publishing we discovered the X5L we'd bought had a faulty connection, which led us to think it didn't have this feature.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

VEGETARIAN DILEMMA

In the UK, *Ethical Consumer* reports on the conundrum vegetarians and vegans in Britain faced last year when news emerged that many of their favourite food products, such as tofu and veggie burgers, could have been made with soy beans grown at the expense of the Amazon rainforest.

Ethical Consumer explains that after the BSE crisis a few years ago, cattle-food producers turned to protein-rich soy beans as a source of cattle food in order to guarantee the safety of their products. These beans were often sourced from Brazil, which increased its soy bean production by increasing the rate of rainforest clearing. And as UK labelling laws don't require manufacturers to state the origin of their ingredients, consumers couldn't easily find out whether the soy in their veggie products was grown "in dodgy environmental circumstances in Brazil".

CREATIVE (OR STEREOTYPED) MARKETING?

When soccer fever takes hold in Germany this month, women who don't share their partner's enthusiasm for spending a month glued to the screen can escape on cheaper than usual package tours, reports *Test* magazine. For the duration of the World Cup, some tour organisers are offering 'wellness specials', or reduced rates on double rooms for singles or 'singles-with-child'.

DOWN A TINNIE ... OF SPARKLING WINE

In the US our sister organisation reports on *SOFIA MINI Blanc de Blancs*, a carbonated white wine sold in a pink, single-serve aluminium can ... with a straw. In a blind test it was judged acceptable yet undistinguished, tasting of generic fruit and with soda-pop-like bubbles. Interestingly, though, when the tasters poured the wine in a glass and could thus swirl it in their mouths, they said it tasted better. "Wine is, after all, meant to be savoured, not sucked through a straw," *Consumer Reports* remarks.



A GLOBAL COMMUNITY?

I may drink orange juice made from oranges that grew in the USA. I may eat chocolates made in Belgium or Switzerland. I may also wear a shirt that was fabricated in China. But I may not enjoy a present sent to me by my sister.

This present was a DVD and it was sent from a European country. It was legally purchased there and I'm reasonably certain this DVD will never be for sale on the Australian market, nor will it ever be televised here. But it's marked for Region 2 and my player is for Region 4. Likewise my sister won't be able to see Australia's beauty, even though the DVD on this subject was legally purchased here.

A free global economy encourages me to eat, drink or wear goods made who-knows-where. But the conglomerates of the very same economy dictate what I'm permitted to see or not to see.

I've heard and read a lot about piracy. But what does that have to

do with me and millions of other law-abiding DVD users worldwide?

Manufacturers of DVD equipment claim all sorts of reasons for their restrictions while actively dictating what people may see when they use their appliances. This is progress?

Jack Trinkhaus

We agree with this reader's complaint about DVD zoning and think it's used more as a marketing tool by DVD content producers than a legitimate copyright protection device. We've called on the Federal Government to amend the Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Act 2000 and to include a provision in the implementing legislation of the Australia/United States Free Trade Agreement to allow consumers to modify their DVD players legally to play DVDs from all regions. For more information on our policy about this go to www.choice.com.au/campaigns and click on 'Communications'.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too. Address these letters to *Thumbs up* at the address on page 2.

To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Jack Trinkhaus, receives *The CHOICE Guide to Digital Photography* or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, page 48.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.

SHRINKING MUESLI BARS

UNCLE TOBYS muesli bars used to be sold in a packet of eight bars with a total weight of 240 g for about \$4. One bar was a great snack at 30 g.

I noticed earlier this year that the total weight has reduced to 160 g, so each bar now only weighs 20 g. But the price stayed the same — so now we're getting a third less for our money.

Everyone in my house is now eating two bars, as a 20 g bar is a mere mouthful. Since these bars mainly contain cheap stuff, like oats and coconut, I can't understand how they can justify this.

You may say don't buy them, but I have no choice — my husband and kids are muesli bar junkies.

Name and address withheld

We contacted UNCLE TOBYS, which told us that following ongoing consumer feedback indicating that a lighter product was preferred, and with the introduction of the 'Nutritious Snack Initiative' nutrition guidelines, the decision was made to reformulate the product.

In making this change UNCLE TOBYS said it achieved two outcomes: the product texture is lighter and crispier, and the muesli bars have an energy content of less than 600 kJ per serve, in

THUMBS UP!



■ Dean, of Moorooka, Queensland, awards a

'Thumbs up' to **THE FLOOD COMPANY**. After applying the first coat of 'Spa-N-Deck' wood care protective finish to his fence he realised he'd bought the wrong colour. He wrote to the company, which promptly sent a technician to the house. He replaced the product with one of the right colour on the spot, free of charge.

■ The day after purchasing an item at **COLORADO ONLINE STORE**, Sharon Clements received an email from the store notifying her of a sale in which the price of her item was reduced. She contacted the store and was reimbursed the difference between what she paid and the sale price.

accordance with the nutrition guidelines.

It says no change has been made to the size and shape of the bar.

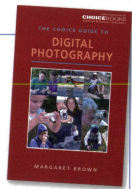
... AND AGAIN

In the past few weeks **UNCLE TOBYS** have done another repackaging and launched the 'all new' **UNCLE TOBYS** muesli bars. This time the 'Improvement' involves reducing the number of bars from eight to six.

So in the space of a year the bars have shrunk in weight by 33% and the number of bars in each box reduced by 25%, yet the price has stayed largely unchanged.

Scott Wales

After receiving a number of letters on this issue we contacted UNCLE TOBYS again, but it declined to make any further comment.





LOVIN' THE LAPTOP

Can you get a good deal on a laptop for less than \$1400?

ON TEST (in rank order)

■ ASUS A3H	\$1399
■ BENQ Joybook R31E	\$1249
■ DELL Latitude D510	\$1349
■ HP Compaq Presario V4000	\$1367
■ LENOVO ThinkPad R51e	\$1299
■ DELL Inspiron 1300	\$998
■ HP Compaq Presario V2000	\$996
■ ACER Aspire 3610	\$1299
■ NEC Versa E2000	\$1399
■ MSI Megabook M520	\$1390
■ TOSHIBA Satellite Pro L20	\$1106
■ PIONEER Dreambook Slim 805	\$1396
■ EXCEL Protac M375S	\$1365

Prices are what we paid in December 2005/January 2006.

Laptops have become a popular computer choice, thanks to increased computing power, portability and cheaper prices. These days any laptop on the market will let you perform basic tasks such as word processing, emailing and surfing the internet without problems.

So what should you look for in a cheap laptop? *Computer CHOICE* tested 13 models to find out.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Try out the trackpad, keyboard and wrist rest to ensure you find them comfortable and easy to use.

Screen size varied from 14" to 15.4" widescreen. Several models use a glossy-screen technology to improve colour and contrast but not everyone likes the effect — check it and see what you think.

Only seven models provided details of the claimed battery life — six of those were reasonably accurate or at least representative. Battery life can depend on what you're doing with the computer — watching a DVD generally results in a slightly shorter battery life, for example.

Make sure the laptop has enough connections for plugging in all your devices, such as a digital camera, printer and MP3 player.

If you plan to carry your laptop around, consider its weight. The models in our test are pretty heavy, weighing between 2.8 and 3.4 kg. You can buy lighter laptops, but they generally cost more.

HOW TO BUY

Large retailers and department stores usually display a good range of laptops. Smaller computer stores often lack display stock and will instead provide a list of models — you may have to wait several days to receive your new laptop but there can be more models on offer. If you buy online, the waiting period is usually no more than two weeks.

It's not unusual to see the same model numbers year after year, even though the specifications are updated regularly — so two laptops can have the same model number but different specs. When you shop for a good deal and find a model at an apparently good price, check the amount of memory (RAM), the type of CD or DVD drive, the computer processor and the operating system against any other samples of that model you've seen to be sure you're comparing like with like.

WARRANTY

The manufacturer warranty of our test products varied from two years to just 90 days. Laptops also come with different warranty types:

- **Return to base** warranties usually require you to pay for somebody to send the laptop to the manufacturer if it needs servicing under warranty.
- **Pick-up and return** warranties include the cost for someone to collect your laptop for repair or service.
- **Onsite** warranties include the cost of a technician coming to your home to service the computer, although it may still need to be taken away for repair.

Computer CHOICE, May/June 2006, has full test results and specifications. If you'd like to subscribe go to www.choice.com.au/magazines or call 1800 069 552 toll-free.

WHAT TO BUY

Best overall:	ASUS A3H	\$1399
Under \$1000:	HP COMPAQ Presario V2000	\$996

- The **ASUS** has a good range of features and topped ease of use. It also scored well for performance and has a two-year warranty.
- The **HP COMPAQ Presario** has the best mix of features and ease of use for less than \$1000. Its warranty is for one year.

Since we tested, HP has recalled battery packs on some models of the **Compaq Presario V2000** due to a potential safety hazard from overheating. The recall affects batteries assembled 1–10 January 2005. They have a barcode label that starts with L3, and HP will replace them free of charge. You can check if a battery pack is affected at www.hp.com/support/BatteryReplacement, or phone 13 10 47.

Where there's fire, there's smoke

A smoke alarm could save your life — but does it matter what type you install?

There can be few more frightening moments than being caught inside a burning house. It's a situation no-one wants to have to face, but fire brigades fight thousands of fires in buildings every year. Sadly, not everyone gets out safely. To escape a house fire, early warning is vital; that's why you need a smoke alarm.

FIRE FACTS

- Across Australia between July 1996 and June 2004, 412 people were killed in 366 fatal residential fires.
- In the cases where it was known whether smoke alarms were installed, 14% had a non-working alarm and 55% had no alarm at all.
- NSW Fire Brigade research indicates that a third to a half of house fire deaths could be avoided by having a working smoke alarm and a practised escape plan.
- Most fatal fires happen at night, when people are usually asleep, and they're most common in winter.
- The majority of fatal fires are caused by electrical faults, smoking materials such as cigarette ash, or heaters and open fires.
- Smoke alarms help limit the damage and cost caused by fires, by detecting them earlier.

WHEN YOU HAVE TO INSTALL ONE

Smoke alarms are mandatory in all newly constructed or substantially renovated homes. For new homes, the smoke alarms must be mains-powered (with battery back-up in case of power failure), so they need to be installed by an electrician. Generally you should have more than one, preferably interconnected so that if one goes off, so do the rest, maximising the chances of alerting everyone in the house. The alarms must comply with the requirements of Australian Standard AS 3786.



In addition to new homes, smoke alarms are also required in all existing homes in the following states:

- Victoria.
- South Australia.
- NSW (from 1 May 2006).
- Queensland (from 1 July 2007).

For existing homes, the alarms don't need to be mains-powered; battery-powered models are acceptable, as long as they meet the Australian standard. Check with your local fire brigade; it can give advice about the laws that apply in your state.

WHAT TYPES ARE AVAILABLE?

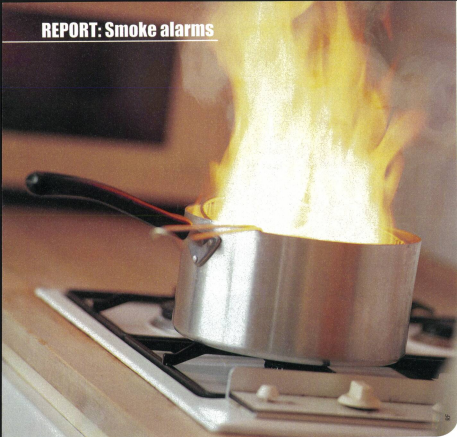
There are two main types of smoke alarm for home use.

Ionisation alarms

- These contain a very small amount of radioactive material (Americium-241), which produces charged particles, or ions, in a test chamber. The alarm monitors the current generated by these ions. When

IN A NUTSHELL

- Smoke alarms are mandatory in newly built homes, and in many states they're required in all other homes as well.
- Photoelectric smoke alarms are best for alerting you to smouldering fires.
- Replace your smoke alarms every 10 years.
- For maximum protection, you also need an escape plan, a fire blanket and an extinguisher.



You can tell whether you have an ionisation alarm because it'll be labelled with a radiation warning symbol, as above.

particles given off in a fire enter the test chamber, the electric current changes, setting off the alarm.

- Basic models can be very cheap (\$10 or less).
- Ionisation models can be prone to nuisance alarms from cooking, so shouldn't be located near a kitchen.
- They're best suited to detecting fast-flaming fires that give off little visible smoke. However, most domestic fires tend to be smoky, smouldering fires, and ionisation alarms aren't as quick at detecting these.
- While the amount of radioactive material in each alarm is too small to be a health hazard, there is a waste disposal issue. One alarm on its own contains a tiny amount, but thousands of alarms together make a significant amount of radioactive waste. Ionisation alarms therefore have rules about how you must dispose of them — check with your local fire brigade.

Photoelectric alarms

- These contain a photo cell and a light beam shining away from the cell. When smoke enters the test chamber, some of the light is scattered by the smoke particles and hits the cell, triggering the alarm. Photoelectric alarms are best at detecting smoky and smouldering fires.
- Dust or insects entering the alarm can cause false alarms, so they have to be cleaned occasionally. Most modern smoke alarms have insect screens to help prevent this problem.

Other types

Other types of alarm available for domestic use include **carbon monoxide** and **heat alarms**.

These are generally for special situations where a photoelectric or ionisation alarm is unsuitable — for example, carbon monoxide alarms are often used overseas to ensure safe operation of central heating systems. Heat alarms are ideal for kitchens. Even if you have one of these types for a special purpose, you should still install a standard smoke alarm as well.

WHICH TYPE IS BEST?

State regulations specify whether your alarm should be mains or battery-powered, but they don't specify the type of alarm you should install; any Australian Standards-approved ionisation or photoelectric alarm will comply. However, recent studies show photoelectric could be the best choice for a home.

Toxic smoke and fumes are a major risk. In a house fire, it's the flames that do the structural damage, but smoke is the main danger to people. The majority of deaths in fires come from smoke inhalation/poisoning. Modern homes contain a lot of materials — such as wood, wool, nylon and plastics — which, when burning, give out heavy smoke and toxic fumes such as carbon monoxide and cyanide gas. These materials can smoulder for a long time, putting out a lot of smoke and fumes before they burst into actual flames.

If you're asleep when the fire starts, you could suffer from smoke inhalation before you wake up; in fact, the combination of toxic smoke and reduced oxygen in the air can make waking up more difficult. So it's important to have an alarm that rapidly detects smoke and fumes.

Photoelectric smoke alarms are much faster at detecting this dangerous situation than ionisation alarms. Studies have shown that photoelectric alarms typically respond to smoky fires within about three to five minutes — when the level of smoke is still fairly low and escape is relatively easy. Most ionisation alarms take much longer — up to 20 minutes or more — by which time there's enough smoke to significantly reduce visibility, making escape much more difficult.

The fast-flaming, relatively smokeless fires that ionisation alarms detect quickly are less common. When such a fire starts, it's usually in the kitchen while someone is there and can do something about it. Even if no one's there, other nearby material usually catches fire quickly and starts giving out smoke. Photoelectric alarms therefore usually detect fast-flaming fires quickly enough too.

Photoelectric smoke alarms are required by Australian standards and the Building Code of Australia for all sleeping areas and exit paths in commercial buildings such as hotels. Industry experts agree that photoelectric smoke alarms should be the

choice for homes — install at least one. However, some fire authorities and most major smoke alarm manufacturers and distributors continue to recommend having at least one of each type of smoke alarm, to cover different fire situations.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- **Standards Australia or SSL certification** ensures the alarm complies with AS 3786.
- **10-year lithium battery:** Some models come with a pre-installed 10-year lithium battery. This eliminates the need to replace the battery every year, since the lithium one will last for the life of the smoke alarm.
- **Test button:** This allows you to check the alarm is working. Some models allow you to test by simply shining a torch on the alarm, eliminating the need to climb a ladder or reach up with a broom handle.
- **Hush button:** Pressing this button silences false alarms for a few minutes — handy if you've only burnt the toast.
- **Battery test:** Battery-powered models should monitor their own battery level and warn you when the battery needs changing by beeping every few seconds.
- **Escape light:** Some models have a light built in, which turns on when the alarm is activated. This is helpful if there's a power failure during a fire, as it can guide you out of the house.
- **Interconnection:** Most mains-powered and some battery-powered alarms can be connected to each other, so that if one goes off, so do the rest.
- **For people with a hearing problem** there are special products available, such as ultraloud alarms, strobe lights and vibrating pads for your bed. For details, contact your state's Deaf Society, Independent Living Centre or fire brigade.

WHERE TO INSTALL THEM

The following is a guide, but check the installation instructions supplied with the alarm.

- If you have just one alarm, install it between the kitchen/living area and the bedrooms. It should be fairly close to the bedrooms so that you can hear it go off when you're sleeping. If you have a hallway that connects all the bedrooms, that's a good place to put the alarm.
- Interconnected alarms in each bedroom, as well as in the living area, can give a higher level of protection. Children and elderly people in particular often aren't reliably woken by an alarm located outside their bedroom.
- For houses with more than one storey, make sure each storey has at least one alarm. Interconnection is strongly recommended in this case.

- Avoid putting smoke alarms in the kitchen or bathroom; you'll probably get a lot of nuisance alarms from cooking fumes and steam. If you do install an alarm in the kitchen, a photoelectric or a heat alarm is likely to give fewer false alarms in this location. Make sure it has a hush button.
- Smoke rises and spreads across the ceiling, filling rooms from top to bottom. Alarms should be on or near the ceiling for earliest warning.
- Avoid dead-air spaces, such as corners between walls or where the wall and ceiling meet. Put the alarm at least 30 cm away from these areas.
- If you have to install the alarm on a wall, make sure it's between 30 and 50 cm below the ceiling. This avoids the dead air space but keeps the alarm high enough to give early warning.

MAINTENANCE TIPS

- Don't paint smoke alarms — the paint could block the air inlets.
- Test each alarm once a month by pressing its test button (or shining a torch on it, if the model has that feature).
- Clean and vacuum alarms every six months. This prevents dust build-up, which can block the air inlets or cause nuisance alarms.
- Change the battery once a year (except for alarms with 10-year lithium batteries). Even if your alarms are mains-powered, they still have a battery for back-up, so they still need to be changed. Do this on a fixed day each year, such as the end of daylight saving, so it's easier to remember.
- Replace your smoke alarms every 10 years. Most alarms indicate their expiry date on their base. ■

More fire safety tips

Fire safety doesn't end with installing smoke alarms. An alarm can't put out a fire and it can't get you out of the house.

- **Escape plan:** Have an escape plan and practise it. Make sure everyone in the house knows the drill. Waking up in the middle of the night to a shrieking alarm with the smell of smoke in the air is frightening and disorienting. If you've practised your escape plan you've got a much better chance of getting out safely. Plan two different ways out of the house, pick a meeting place outside (such as at the letterbox), and make sure you've planned for helping any children, aged or infirm residents. Don't deadlock your doors at night — you might be unable to find your keys in the confusion of a fire. Once outside, account for all people in the house and call the fire brigade. Don't go back inside the burning building.
- **Fire extinguisher and fire blanket:** These are useful to have in the kitchen, where fires often start. Read the instructions and know how to use them. However, if you don't feel confident to fight a fire, don't risk it. Switch off the burning appliance if possible, get out and call the fire brigade.

Food marketing: child's play?

We take a look at how food is marketed to children, and what the problems are.

IN A NUTSHELL

Kids are a special target for food marketing and increasingly sophisticated methods are used to reach them. What's even worse is that most of the products being promoted are far from healthy.

To help prevent food marketing from having a negative impact on kids' diets — and to protect them from being exploited — the government needs to improve the regulation of food promotion to children.

Children are exposed to food marketing every day. Some forms of marketing have been around for years — promotions on food packaging, branded vending machines in schools, prominent sponsorship of sports (McDonalds sponsors Little Athletics; Coca Cola is a major corporate sponsor of AFL, and has sponsored every Olympics since 1928), product placement in movies and on TV shows and, of course, the vast quantities of ads on any commercial TV kids watch.

But the techniques used to create brand awareness and desire for particular products are getting increasingly more sophisticated, and have the ability to reach more children than ever before.

CYBERSPACE: THE SUBLIMINAL SELL

With over 70% of all households with children under 15 having access to the internet at home, food companies are seeing this as a key way of promoting their brands to a media-savvy generation of children and teenagers. What's worrying is that online marketing isn't subject to the current voluntary code of practice for advertising to children, which applies to print, TV and radio advertising only. And even the most vigilant parent might struggle to protect their child from some forms of online marketing that can fly under the radar.

The technology of the internet allows companies to reach children in many ways, including:

Advergaming. The idea behind 'advertainment' isn't to deliver a straightforward "buy my product" message, but rather to work on the branding aspect, to build a relationship with the children.

Food company websites often have dedicated kids' sections, with games and quizzes that incorporate the food products, logos and company 'spokes-characters'.

Games on the McDonald's website include a memory game, catch the nuggets and connect the dots, all featuring McDonald's spokes-characters such as Ronald McDonald and the Hamburger.

The Maggi Noodles website (from Nestlé) encourages kids to join and become a 'Noodolbot', so they can "receive special newsletters, hear about new



games and cool stuff from Noodolbot and Maggi".

YoGo Alley from National Foods is a veritable online games arcade, with many of the games giving children the opportunity to beat other competitors. Daily competitions or monthly prizes encourage repeat visits, and sometimes an access code or barcode from the product is required to play.

E-cards. Websites encourage children to send electronic cards to their friends via email. The cards generally display images and logos of products and invite the kids who receive them to visit and join the website club or play online games.

Cyber game product placement. Food companies are incorporating their products and brand into popular computer games or game websites. A version of the incredibly popular **THE SIMS** game has a McDonald's kiosk as a place of employment for its virtual characters. Players can earn virtual money from running the virtual business, and the characters who eat the food served there earn credits for both 'hunger' and 'fun'.

Screensavers/wallpaper. Many food company websites offer users free screensavers or wallpaper. Ultimately, these work as semi-permanent ads, ensuring daily exposure to a brand.

Viral marketing. Instead of using traditional advertising to promote **Real Fruit Winders** in the UK, Kellogg's launched an interactive website including animated icons that children could email to each other. As the agency responsible described it: "Activity focused on reaching playground leaders who could be relied upon to spread the word, ensuring a trickle-down effect on awareness and sales."



ON-PACK PROMOS

Submerged in this culture of marketing, children are usually asking for particular products before you even make it to the shops. But once they're in the supermarket, enticing promotions on the product packaging are key, as these products are often displayed on lower shelves at kids' eye level, or at the checkout where a queue can prevent you from whisking them past the desired item. And the resulting pestering, whining and tantrums can make it hard to say no. Who hasn't heard the wheedling cry of "Pleeese, mummy" resounding down the aisles?

To get an idea of what parents are up against when out shopping with children, we scoured the supermarket shelves for food products carrying promotions aimed at kids. In just one visit each to a Coles and a Woolworths, we found and bought over 70 different products, the majority of which were high in sugar and/or fat, with items like chocolate, sweet biscuits, sugary breakfast cereals and confectionery among the most frequently promoted. From these we identified five main types of on-product promotion — favourite characters, movie tie-ins, competitions, giveaways and activities.

POPULAR PACKAGING PLOYS

Most of the products in our sample used one or more of the following types of promotion:

■ **Favourite characters.** Studies have shown that the mere appearance of a character with a product can significantly alter a child's perception of it. Not surprisingly, one of the key methods of marketing

to children, particularly the youngest age groups, is to associate food brands with cartoon and TV characters, taking advantage of children's familiarity with or affection for them. Winnie the Pooh, The Simpsons, Bugs Bunny, Rugrats, Postman Pat, Bob the Builder, SpongeBob Squarepants and Thomas the Tank Engine were just some of the characters that featured on the packaging of products in our sample.

As the UK trade magazine *Promotions & Incentives* explains: "Marketers know young children are incapable of having a relationship with a brand, but they realise kids have a strong connection with characters such as Bob the Builder and Noddy, who might enter their homes every day via the television."

Some characters have even been created as the spokes-character for a particular brand or product (think Snap, Crackle and Pop of **KELLOGG'S Rice Bubbles** fame). They're not only used on product packaging, but in TV ads and sometimes interactive games on the product or company's website. Because of their ongoing association with the product, a child needs only to see the character to be reminded of the food they promote, and their impact can be astonishing. For example, it's been said American children are almost as likely to recognise Ronald McDonald as they are Santa Claus.

■ **Movie tie-ins.** You've probably noticed that with each major kids' blockbuster movie release comes a variety of products featuring images from the movie on their packaging. The 'Turn your world white' *Narnia* promotion from Cadbury, Schweppes, Pepsi and Cottee's — where TV and cinema ads promoted the associated products, which in turn promoted the movie on their packaging — was a prime example.

Playing with food

A newsletter on a web resource for marketers to young children suggests bending the rules of parenting and gives this advice for marketers targeting the kids' chocolate market:

"The first rule to break here is 'don't play with your food'. Any way you can find to make the chocolate treat *into* a toy will be a positive step!" It goes on to mention the success of **KINDER SURPRISE** eggs, each of which contains a toy or game to assemble and play with.

There seems to be no end to the ways to integrate food brands into a small child's play. Among the products we saw were an **M&M Counting Book** (which encourages kids to use it in conjunction with a pack of different-coloured **M&Ms** to learn how to count), a **YUPI Gummi Lunch** pack (containing candy versions of pizza, burgers, chips, cola and other fast-food favourites for kids to build their own meal) and a McDonald's **McKIDS Play Food Set** (with plastic burgers, nuggets, cash register and drive-through headset, so kids can play at working and eating in McDonald's).



Nestlé tied in with 2005's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by producing Wonka-branded chocolate bars and confectionery. The tie-in had the advantage of being able to mirror the plot of the film, with Nestlé hiding five golden tickets (which allowed recipients to win major prizes) in bars.

■ **Competitions.** What kid could resist the chance to win a trip to Disneyland or the Nestlé chocolate factory, an iPod, a Malvern Star bike, a skateboard or

movie passes? Over half the products in our sample offered prizes as an enticement to buy them.

Often to enter the competition kids have to SMS their details or fill in an entry form online. Not only does this give companies an instant source of personal details for future marketing, but in the case of websites, it's another medium through which the product can be promoted to the child.

■ **Giveaways.** Stickers, magnets, tazos, watches, CD-ROMs and DVDs are just a few of the freebies we got with products in our survey. Invariably, the freebie is just one of a set, so in order to collect all four, six, eight or whatever, you need to buy more than one pack. Fast-food outlets have got this marketing tactic down pat — see 'Free' toys, below left, for more

■ **Activities.** Activities such as join-the-dots, quizzes, mazes and colouring-in are used to appeal to children in the supermarket, helping one brand to win out against another. They also encourage a child to spend time reading the packaging and becoming familiar with the brand or the spokes-character. See *Playing with food*, page 13, for more examples.

THE PROBLEM WITH PROMOS

There seems to be no escape for children from the constant barrage of food marketing in all its forms. And because advertising and promotions influence kids' food preferences and choices, food marketing may affect kids' diets and, ultimately, health.

A review of research on the effects of food promotion to children, prepared for the UK Food Standards Agency, concluded that, "Food products which are most promoted to children are those which are likely to contribute to an unhealthy diet." And it's certainly our experience with the foods we found in supermarkets that this is the case here too.

Advertisers generally argue that all they're doing is providing consumers with choice. For very young children, though, there's evidence that they can't tell the difference between ads and genuine programs on TV. Marketing aimed at kids can easily exploit this inability, adding another element to the problems with it. Many people think children should be protected from being taken advantage of in this way.

CHOICE wants to see the food industry finally take a more responsible approach to the promotion of food to kids. A new voluntary code of practice is being developed by the industry, which looks more broadly at the marketing of food and drinks, including the more insidious forms of marketing via the internet. While this may help, we think the Federal Government needs to do its bit too and take action to improve regulation of food promotion — in all its forms — to children. ■

'Free' toys

For many years now, kids' meals from fast-food outlets have been promoted with free toys. Often the toys are based on children's movies or TV shows or are popular toys like Bratz dolls, Hot Wheels cars or Lego. To keep the children coming back, the toys that come with the meals are promoted in collectable sets, which change regularly.

Ice Age 2 toys from Hungry Jack's, Kong toys from KFC and Chicken Little, Strawberry Shortcake and Ninja Turtles toys from McDonald's are among the many promotions we've seen at these chains so far this year. Sometimes the toys are gender-specific: Furby toys for girls and Racer toys for boys from Red Rooster, for example.

'Free' toys can be particularly effective at boosting sales. When Burger King in the US featured Teletubbies beanbag toys with its children's meals in 1999, sales of the meals doubled over the six-week promotion period.

This practice may seem relatively harmless, but it comes at a cost. First, there are usually at least four toys in the set to collect; the McDonald's 'The Dog Artist Collection' promotion in April had 12. Second, they run for a limited time only (in the case of the 'Dog' promotion, just 27 days). And you've got to get in fast as they regularly 'sell out'. If your child wants to collect all 12, that's a McDonald's Happy Meal practically every second or third day. At \$4.25 a meal, the costs add up, nutritionally as well as financially — not to mention the plethora of plastic that rapidly spreads through the house.

Interestingly, it's not just kids who collect the toys, but adults too, and it seems some collectors take it quite seriously. A search on eBay brought up 468 individual items or sets of McDonald's promotional toys for sale, ranging in price from 95 cents (for a Care Bears toy) up to \$1000 (for 538 pieces "lovingly collected over a 10-year period").

A cut above the rest

Our secateurs test proves again that top price doesn't always mean top quality.

Want your garden neat and trim and your plants in optimal health? Then give them a good prune every once in a while. To do the job, a high-quality pair of secateurs — ones that cut your plants cleanly and don't hurt your hand with prolonged use — are a must.

We tested 17 pairs of secateurs ranging from bargain basement (\$20) to top shelf (\$99) and everything in between.

PUT TO THE TEST

Our test measured cutting performance by mounting each pair of secateurs into a bench jig and measuring how well they cut an 8 mm piece of pine dowelling and a 10 mm and 16 mm piece of freshly cut willow branch. Our test measured the widest diameter the secateurs could cut, how clean the cuts they made were (was there any cell or bark damage, or splitting of the wood?) and how much force was needed to operate them.

For ease of use our panel of four experienced gardeners, two men and two women, rated each pair of secateurs for comfort, usability, ease of reassembly after cleaning, ease in performing light and heavy work and the quality of their instructions.

ANVIL AND BYPASS

Secateurs fall into two categories — anvil and bypass. Bypass secateurs are far more common, which is reflected in our test: 14 of the 17 are bypass.

Bypass secateurs work like scissors. The plant rests on the curved bottom blade and is cut by the sharper top blade as it slices past the bottom blade. With bypass secateurs you can cut branches off right against the stem. They're also great for reaching spots that are hard to get to.

Anvils have a flat blade at the bottom. The top blade does the cutting, as with the bypass, but instead of slicing past the bottom blade it comes down onto it (like a guillotine).

Anvils are supposed to be better for cutting thicker, woodier stems. Bypass, on the other hand, are said to be more suited to cutting softer, stringier living stems. Our test results didn't totally support this, however — of the three best performers on pine in terms of the amount of force required to cut (the **SPEAR & JACKSON Premium**, **CYCLONE Ratchet Bypass Pruner** and **WILTSHIRE RatchetGard**), only the **WILTSHIRE** has an anvil blade.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ **Three models** — see What to buy, page 16 — stood out as top performers, but if your garden doesn't need a lot of tough pruning, you might prefer to pick one with a higher ease of use score.

■ **If you want your secateurs to last, look after them** — see page 17.



What to buy

Models are profiled in rank order.

The **SPEAR & JACKSON** and **CYCLONE** have the best cutting performance. While the **CYCLONE** is the cheapest of the three, the other two are easier to use.

SPEAR & JACKSON PREMIUM SJ-6160BS

Price: \$50

GOOD POINTS

- Best overall cutting performance, and it was rated equal second for cleanliness of cut.
- Needed the least force when cutting willow.
- Easy to use.
- Adjustable handle width.
- Teflon coating on blades.

BAD POINTS

- The lock is only easily accessible for right-handed people.

CYCLONE RATCHET BYPASS PRUNER 657726

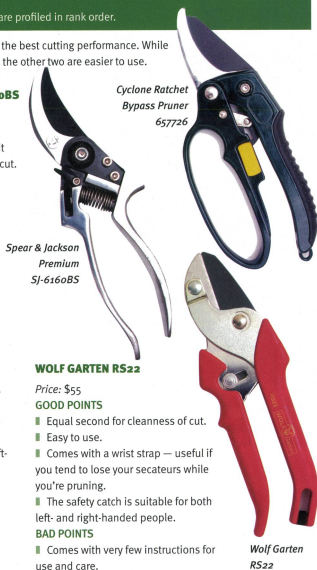
Price: \$36

GOOD POINTS

- Very good overall cutting performance.
- Needed the least force when cutting pine dowel.
- Cut the largest cross-section of all.
- The safety catch is suitable for both left- and right-handed people.
- Teflon coating on blades.
- Knuckle guard.
- Comes with instructions for use.
- Five-year warranty.

BAD POINTS

- Difficult to dismantle for cleaning.



WOLF GARTEN RS22

Price: \$55

GOOD POINTS

- Equal second for cleanliness of cut.
- Easy to use.
- Comes with a wrist strap — useful if you tend to lose your secateurs while you're pruning.
- The safety catch is suitable for both left- and right-handed people.

BAD POINTS

- Comes with very few instructions for use and care.

Brand / model (in rank order)

SPEAR & JACKSON Premium SJ-6160BS

CYCLONE Ratchet Bypass Pruner 657726

WOLF GARTEN RS22

GARDENA 608

SPEAR & JACKSON SJ-6059BS

CYCLONE Heavy Duty Anvil Pruner 657337

FELCO 2

GARDENA Basic 600

FISKARS 9652

FREUND 2990

GARDENERS CHOICE Ladies Pruner KM1055

BAHCO P126-19

PATIO BY JAMIE DURIE Deluxe Bypass Pruner 392349

WILTSHIRE RatchetGard 2800

WOLF GARTEN RR22

FELCO 5

WILTSHIRE General Purpose Gard 2200

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

There was quite a difference in cutting performance between the top three in the *What to buy* list and the remaining models on test.

■ The **GARDENA 608**, **SPEAR & JACKSON SJ-6059BS** and **CYCLONE Heavy Duty Anvil Pruner** are easy to use but didn't cut as well as the top three. They'd be fine if your garden doesn't have any tough pruning. (At \$20, the **SPEAR & JACKSON** is the cheapest of the three.)

What to look for

The best way to choose a pair of secateurs is to try them in your hand before buying (most are packaged to allow you to do this).

- **Handles** should fit your hand comfortably and you should be able to open and close them repeatedly without them hurting your hand. Brightly coloured handles mean you can find the secateurs easily if you drop them in a pile of cuttings.
- The **safety catch** is operated by a thumb lever or a sliding catch. Check that the catch is easy for you to operate (also see *Left-handed*, right).
- **Avoid** blades that have sharp points that stick

out at the end — they're generally unnecessary and you could accidentally cut yourself with them. Both the **FELCOs**, the **BAHCO** and the **GARDENA 600** have sharp points on their blades.

- The **pivot** (the bolt holding the two blades together) should be easily adjusted with a screwdriver or a small spanner. A pivot with an adjusting nut that locks into position is your best bet to avoid it coming loose.
- **Teflon coating** is supposed to keep the blades from rusting, although the coating could come off over time. Any blade made of stainless steel or aluminium should be relatively rustproof, as long as you take care of it (see *Care of your secateurs*, right).



PERFORMANCE				FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS					
1 Overall score (%)	2 Cutting performance score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	Max. cutting diameter (claimed / measured, mm)	Ambidextrous lock	Replaceable blade	Type	Weight (g)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
80	85	73	15 / 27			Bypass	180	ns	Taiwan	Spear & Jackson	50
74	82	62	25 / 25	✓		Bypass	247	5	Taiwan	Cyclone Industries	36
74	75	72	ns / 20	✓	✓	Anvil	274	10	Germany	CIC Suppliers	55
68	63	75	20 / 22	✓	✓ (A)	Bypass	199	25	Germany	Nylex Consumer Products	43
67	60	77	ns / 22	✓		Bypass	198	10	Taiwan	Spear & Jackson	20
66	62	72	19 / 25	✓		Anvil	247	5	Taiwan	Cyclone Industries	37
64	67	59	25 / 30		✓	Bypass	244	1 (B)	Switzerland	Felco	99
64	55	77	18 / 20		✓	Bypass	167	25	Germany	Nylex Consumer Products	33
63	58	70	ns / 20		✓	Bypass	193	5	Finland	Fiskars Brands	40
62	65	57	ns / 22	✓		Bypass	196	3	Germany	Products of Excellence	54
62	60	64	ns / 25	✓		Bypass	181	2	China	McPhersons Housewares	15
59	55	66	15 / 22	✓		Bypass	218	ns	France	Bahco Tools	36
58	57	60	20 / 30	✓		Bypass	219	5	Taiwan	Kmart	20
58	58	59	19 / 22	✓		Anvil	178	5	Korea	McPhersons Housewares	31
57	52	64	20 / 25	✓	✓	Bypass	257	10	Germany	CIC Suppliers	63
55	55	56	25 / 27		✓	Bypass	317	1	Switzerland	Felco	52
51	45	60	25 / 30		✓	Bypass	227	2	Japan	McPhersons Housewares	25

■ The two **FELCO** models on test didn't live up to their brand's reputation (or price). The **FELCO 2** was the most expensive in the test at \$99 but scored just 64% overall. On the plus side it was capable of cutting the thickest stems in our test. The **FELCO 5** (\$52) was second bottom overall.

■ The **FREUND 2990** had the highest score for cut quality, but was let down in other areas.

■ The **WOLF GARTEN RR22** and **WILTSHIRE General Purpose Gard 2200** had the lowest overall cutting scores.

■ The remaining models either only have an average score for cutting performance or aren't that easy to use.

LEFT-HANDED?

Unfortunately none of the models on test is specifically for left-handed people. If you're left-handed, look for secateurs that have an ambidextrous safety catch — see the table for tested models that do. A company called **LEFT HANDED PRODUCTS AUSTRALIA** (www.users.bignod.com/LHPA) makes garden tools especially for left-handed people, but we haven't tested them and so can't comment on their performance. **FELCO** also makes secateurs specifically for left-handers.



Care of your secateurs

- Keep your secateurs sharp — besides making them less effective, blunt blades can also damage a plant. Sharpen them on a small oil stone.
- Don't leave your secateurs out in the elements to rust.
- Once you've finished a clipping or pruning session, clean off the sap by rubbing the secateurs with an oily cloth.
- Some experts recommend replacing the blades on your secateurs from time to time. See the table for which models have replaceable blades.
- Don't use your secateurs to cut branches bigger than they're capable of cutting — it could break or damage them.
- Pull your secateurs apart occasionally and oil the moving parts, including the pivot.

* Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in April 2006, or what we paid in February 2006.

ns Not stated.

(A) Top blade only.

(B) 'Lifetime' on handles.

1 Overall score:

The overall score is a combination of the following:

- Cutting performance score: 60%
- Ease of use score: 40%

2 Cutting performance score

This consists of the following equally weighted assessments (see *Put to the test*, page 15, for details):

- The cleanliness of the cut.
- How much force was needed to cut the test branches/dowel.

3 Ease of use score

■ A panel of four experienced amateur gardeners assessed the following equally weighted aspects, which made up 80% of the ease of use score: the secateur's balance and fit in the hand; its weight; how wide its handle opens; the design of the handle and feel of the material; the usefulness and clarity of instructions; how easy it is to use for light work, such as cutting flowers, and heavy work, like cutting hedge stems; how easy it is to use the safety catch; and how easy it is to use in difficult-to-reach places.

■ The remaining 20% of the score rated ease of maintenance: instructions; dismantling and reassembly; and adjusting the pivot tension.

DON'T FALL FOR THESE SHARE OFFERS

A number of readers have received letters from **DIRECT SHARE PURCHASING CORPORATION (DSPC)** offering to buy their shares at well below market value. The company gets investors' names, addresses and shareholding details from company registers and recently targeted AMP and IAG shareholders. Both companies, as well as the NSW Fair Trading Minister, have issued warnings about the offers.

CHOICE reader Andy (right) was offered \$3 per IAG ordinary share, which, as DSPC noted in its letter, had a \$5.36 market value. "The offer arrived on the same day that IAG announced the possibility of a share buy-back to return capital to shareholders," Andy says. "Noting that the letter was headed DSPC and not IAG or its trustee, I reread the offer and realised DSPC was offering well below my shares' market value." Unlike thousands of IAG shareholders, Andy didn't return DSPC's acceptance form. By mid-April, his shares were worth around \$5.50. Next, in a separate offer to IAG preference shareholders in April, DSPC offered \$63 per share; these preference shares were then trading at around \$104.

These offers, while poor value for shareholders, aren't illegal. However, the man behind DSPC, David Tweed, has a history of making below-value 'off-market' share offers, and several of his companies have been the subject of Australian Securities and Investments Commission actions.

In one particular case, ASIC alleged that an unsolicited offer to **AEVUM** shareholders by **NATIONAL EXCHANGE**, another of David Tweed's companies, was misleading or deceptive, and that the company had

engaged in unconscionable conduct. Although the Federal Court rejected these allegations and found that the offer didn't contravene the relevant law, and an appeal to the Full Federal Court wasn't upheld, it commented that, "The conduct can properly be described as predatory and against good conscience" and "designed to take advantage of inexperienced offerees".

Mr Tweed disagrees with these views. He says he provides a convenient way to sell shares; you simply sign a form and receive a cheque within three business days of acceptance.

Our advice? Steer well clear of such poor-value offers — don't sell yourself short by offloading your investment for less than it's worth. Don't be pressured into doing anything — you don't have to sell.

If you want to sell listed shares, do it through a licensed stockbroker (online trades cost as little as \$20 to \$30). That way you'll get the market price, instead of losing 40% or more.



CHOICE reader Andy didn't sell his IAG shares cheap to DSPC, but thousands of other shareholders did.



ASIC acts on reverse mortgage

CHOICE *Money & Rights*' recent investigation of reverse mortgages raised concerns about **Annuity Plus Reverse Mortgage/Options**, the reverse mortgage provided by **TRANSCOMM CREDIT UNION**. We passed these concerns on to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC).

Our concerns included:

- The product didn't offer a 'no negative equity guarantee' — a guarantee that if the amount you owe exceeds the value of your property when you sell, the company will cover the shortfall. We think this guarantee is essential. Responding to this, **TRANSCOMM** told us it will now introduce this cover for all new and existing customers.
- **TRANSCOMM** reviews your regular income payments as interest rates and/or the value of your home fluctuate. As a result, the income you're receiving from the loan could change and no longer be as much as you need. **TRANSCOMM** says it's to ensure that the borrower doesn't get into negative equity.

- The product name includes the word 'annuity', which could be confusing, as it's a loan and not an annuity under the normal definition of annuities.

ASIC has now found that some statements in and the overall message of some **TRANSCOMM** advertising material was misleading because they:

- Included false claims about the product's impact on pension entitlements and its competitiveness.
- Misrepresented the extent to which consumers' interests were protected by some of the product's design features.

ASIC has accepted an enforceable undertaking from **TRANSCOMM**, the provisions of which include providing existing borrowers with an opportunity to 'undo' their loans and to claim compensation for any loss suffered by relying on representations in the advertising material. Get in touch with **TRANSCOMM** on (03) 9629 4484 if you want to do this.

Kids' stuff?

Ready-made pasta sauces are quick and easy — but our experts were unimpressed.

Pasta's a favourite with most people — in fact a recent survey found that spaghetti bolognese is Australia's second most favourite food (after a traditional sausage with vegetables and gravy). So for a quick dinner when you're short of time, what could be better than pasta with one of the ready-made sauces from the supermarket?

We served 14 big-name pasta sauces to three food experts and asked for their verdict (see the table on page 20 for the brands they tasted). They weren't enthusiastic about any of them. If you're feeding little kids they'd probably be happy, the experts said, but grown-ups deserve better.

THE SAUCES

There are dozens of different pasta sauces on the supermarket shelves, not to mention the 'fresh' versions in the chiller cabinet. We couldn't test them all, so we focused on three popular varieties and picked the leading brands available in most supermarkets: eight tomato-based (napoletana) sauces, three brands of pesto and three of carbonara. Two of the tomato and two of the carbonara sauces were chilled; the rest were the shelf-stable types sold in jars.

THE TASTING

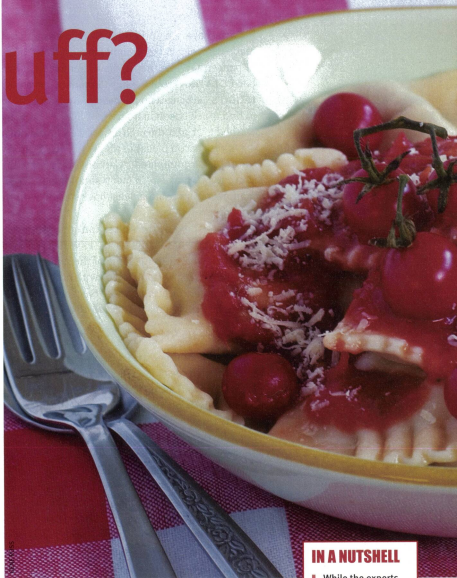
We heated the sauces following the instructions on the label and served them with penne. The three food experts (see *Meet the experts*, page 21) independently scored each sauce for appearance, texture, flavour and overall impression. We also asked them to comment on the authenticity of the sauce — does it taste like the original Italian recipe? The tasters didn't know the brands they were tasting and the sauces were presented in a random order within flavour types (tomato first, followed by pesto then carbonara).

THE VERDICT

While it's possible the experts were more critical than some of us might be, they weren't much impressed with any of the sauces.

■ **Tomato.** According to the experts, if you're after the authentic taste of Italy you'll be disappointed, but these sauces are still the best of the bunch. The tasters liked the colour of most of them, but on the whole thought the sauces lacked depth of flavour and were too sweet. Their verdict: these sauces seem to be trying to suit too broad a spectrum of tastes, and the result is a fairly characterless end product.

■ **Pesto.** Traditional pesto is made from basil, pinenuts, parmesan cheese, garlic and extra-virgin olive oil. Instead, we found sauces made with peanut oil or cashew nuts. So perhaps it's not surprising that these sauces only scored around 50% or less. The experts' verdict: the colour's wrong and none of these sauces looks or tastes like fresh, home-made pesto.



IN A NUTSHELL

■ While the experts thought some of the tomato-based (napoletana) sauces were OK, they were scathing about the pesto and carbonara sauces they tasted.

■ The chilled 'fresh' sauces didn't stand out as consistently better than the cheaper and more convenient shelf-stable versions in jars.

■ **Carbonara.** An authentic carbonara sauce should be made from egg yolks, cream, parmesan and diced bacon or pancetta. While they all have cream and at least some bacon, **LATINA Fresh Creamy Carbonara** has no egg and **LEGGO'S Carbonara** no parmesan. And you'd be lucky to find much bacon in a serve of **LEGGO'S Carbonara** — we washed a jar of it through a sieve and found only about 4 g of tiny bacon pieces in the whole 565 g jar. As one of the experts commented, "Carbonara is a very difficult sauce to pre-make — in fact it shouldn't be." However, the manufacturers could at least have started with the right ingredients.

To be fair, while the sauces can stand alone as an accompaniment to plain pasta (as we served them), the serving instructions for some of the tomato-based ones suggest serving with ravioli or with additions such as cooked mince or diced cooked chicken — all of which would be likely to make them tastier.

BETTER FRESH?

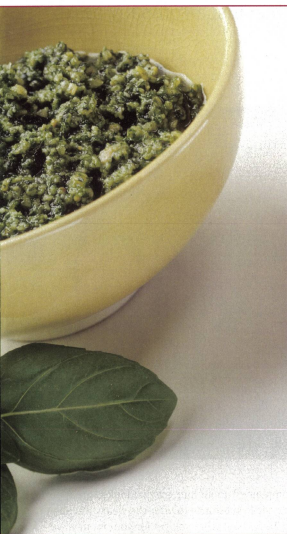
The manufacturer of the **LATINA** range of 'fresh' pasta sauces (you'll see many other flavours in addition to the two in this test) told us its sauces taste better than the cheaper equivalents in jars because they're fresh, and because they're a 'premium' product. But the 'fresh' sauces in this test didn't stand out as obviously better. **SAN REMO Fresh Traditional Napoletana** scored best of the tomato sauces, but **SAN REMO Fresh Traditional Carbonara** was rated worst of the carbonaras and **LATINA Fresh Creamy Carbonara** scored the same as **LEGGO'S Carbonara** from a jar.

And how 'fresh' anyway is a sauce that can be stored for about two months in the fridge before reaching its use-by date?

STOCK/SHOOT



Brand (in rank order within groups)	1 Score (%)	2 Expert tasters' comments	3 Energy (kJ / serve)	3 Total fat (g / serve)	4 Sodium (% upper RDI)*	Weight (g)
TOMATO-BASED (serve size 125 g)						
SAN REMO Fresh Traditional Napoletana (A)	64	Not unpleasant; reasonable authenticity	388	5.6	35	420
BARILLA Napoletana	61	Acidic and sharp in taste but some positive flavour	333	4.6	33	400
DOLMIO Tomato, Onion & Basil Chunky	61	I could actually taste a tomato flavour	289	0.3	27	570
PAUL NEWMAN'S OWN Tomato, Onion and Garlic Classic	61	Not as harsh as some of the others	210	1.6	35	750
RAGULETTO Napolitana Classic Tomato	49	A vinegary and harsh taste; lack of any tomato flavour	345	1.6	21	500
LEGGO'S Napoletana	43	A little bland and 'gooey'; it reminds me of tinned tomato soup	383	3.7	26	575
RAGULETTO Napolitana Classic Tomato Low Salt	43	A bit too sweet and acidic; just no flavour	331	1.9	7	500
LATINA Fresh Italian Tomato & Garlic (A)	34	Lack of any flavour depth or sweetness; acidic and watery	320	3.2	9	425
PESTO (serve size 45 g)						
DOLMIO Basil Pesto	52	Little flavour of parmesan or pinenuts, or even garlic	320	7.2	11	165
BARILLA Pesto alla Genovese con Basilico Fresco	46	This isn't too bad, but the colour isn't good	983	24.9	28	190
LEGGO'S Pesto Concentrato Creamy Basil and Pinenut	16	Start again	560	11.9	13	190
CARBONARA (serve size 125 g)						
LATINA Fresh Creamy Carbonara (A)	22	Really poor; too creamy	782	13.5	15	425
LEGGO'S Carbonara	22	No traditional taste or flavour	563	10.6	30	565
SAN REMO Fresh Traditional Carbonara (A)	16	It just isn't close to the real thing	1255	27.4	42	400



DIY tips

While obviously more trouble than opening a jar, the sauces in this test are nearly as quick and easy to make from scratch — and you're almost guaranteed to end up with a tastier dinner. Here are some tips from our home economist (the quantities give you enough to serve four).

Tomato

Pasta of your choice
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves garlic (peeled and chopped finely)
1 chilli, finely chopped (optional)
2 x 440 g tins crushed tomatoes
Fresh basil or oregano (dried herbs are also OK)
Ground black pepper and salt to taste (if you use it)

While the pasta's cooking, fry the garlic and chilli gently in the oil, add the tinned tomatoes, heat until boiling and add the herbs. You can serve it straightaway but if you let it cook for 10–15 minutes longer you'll get a richer sauce (start cooking the pasta later).

Carbonara

250 g fettuccine
4 rashers bacon or pancetta (remove rind and slice into thin strips)
½ cup cream
Pinch paprika
1 egg yolk
1 whole egg
60 g grated parmesan cheese
Ground black pepper

While the fettuccine's cooking, fry the bacon until crisp. Add the cream and paprika, heat gently for one minute, then remove from the heat. Add the cooked pasta, combined egg yolk and whole egg, and half the cheese. Stir the sauce through the pasta and season with pepper. Serve with the remaining parmesan cheese to sprinkle.

Pesto

Using a blender or food processor, combine fresh basil, pinenuts, garlic and lemon juice, gradually adding olive oil to get a smooth consistency. (For more details see the article on handheld blenders in CHOICE, April 2006.)

Price per
serve (\$)**

* RDI: Recommended daily intake.

** Based on prices we paid in Sydney in March 2006.

(A) 'Fresh' sauces with more limited shelf-life, from the supermarket chiller cabinet.

1 Score

This is the average of the three experts' overall scores.

2 Experts' comments

These are representative comments compiled from the tasters' individual notes.

3 Energy and total fat

The manufacturers' recommended serve sizes vary, so for ease of comparison we used a standard serve size for each flavour type and calculated kilojoules, total fat and sodium per serve from the figures stated in the nutrition

information panel on the label. You'd probably serve less of the pesto than the other sauces, which we took into account.

4 Sodium

Calculated from the amount of sodium per serve and the maximum recommended daily intake (RDI) for adults (2300 mg). Small children should have less, and many of these sauces are a bit too salty to give them often.

GENE ROSS



Meet the experts

Many thanks go to our panel of food experts, pictured from left to right:

- Sam Cosentino, hospitality industry consultant.
- Syd Pemberton, Pemberton's Food Workshop and author of *How to cook practically anything* (CHOICE Books — see page 48).
- James Kidman, executive chef, Otto's Ristorante Italiano, Woolloomooloo, Sydney.

Is membership of an airline lounge worth more than just a company perk?

A privilege worth paying for?

IN A NUTSHELL

■ Airline lounge membership may be worth paying for if you're a frequent traveller, especially for long-haul travel and if you travel for work and want to make good use of your time at the airport.

■ The quality of different lounges around the world varies substantially.

■ If you're using an airline lounge primarily for business purposes, the cost of the membership is tax-deductible in Australia.

Ever had a 12-hour stopover, enduring hard plastic chairs (if you could get a seat at all) in a dirty, crowded terminal after a long-haul journey in cramped economy class? Or frittered away hours of valuable time because of rescheduled domestic flights? If so, you've probably fantasised about joining an airline lounge club.

An airline lounge membership may entitle you to a comfortable, quiet place to relax and wait for your flight, with priority check-in, complimentary snacks or light meals, beverages (including alcoholic drinks) and reading materials. You might be able to have a shower at a stopover, or use a computer and other office equipment to make the most of your time.

Some international lounges may be particularly luxurious, with massage chairs, noodle bars, sleeping areas, designated smoking points, spas and even prayer rooms. On the other side of the coin, we heard reports of lounges so crowded that there were no seats available, or situations where lounge users couldn't use facilities like showers because the queues were too long. Patrons told us of lounges where there was little or no food left and the service was atrocious, or whose membership only entitled them to one free alcoholic drink. Other users

complained about lounges that looked great but had very little substance to offer the weary traveller.

To find out what you get for your money, we looked at the information available to consumers about different lounges, spoke to airlines and asked subscribers to tell us about their experiences using lounges.

DOMESTIC TRAVEL

"Qantas is great value ... even on short journeys in crowded airports a hot shower and somewhere peaceful to sit can be a refuge. Staff are helpful and will sort out problems or find information for you."

Stuart West.

"I would recommend The Qantas Club for frequent flyers, but ... in some smaller airports ... the lounge is very small and you can struggle to get a seat at times. If one of these is your main hub, you may get annoyed at the lack of comfort."

Justine Boland.

"I used the Virgin Blue Room when I got a rescheduled flight. It was good — I spent most of the time reading papers and on the PlayStation."

Alan Bowler.

"The Blue Room in Brisbane looks like an RSL lounge, and you're always putting your hand in your pocket. I thought it'd be better."

Liz Trent.

If the bulk of your travel is domestic, you have the choice of three lounge clubs to join — The Qantas Club, Virgin Blue's The Blue Room and the Regional Express Rex Lounge. Rex only has lounges in Adelaide and Sydney (passengers in Melbourne can use the Virgin lounge).

Membership of The Qantas Club is far more expensive upfront (from \$685 for one year's membership to \$4200 for life membership), compared to \$199 for yearly use of The Blue Room or \$265 for a year's membership of the Rex Lounge. But apart from a fee if you hire a conference room, Qantas Club members don't have to pay extra for services. Membership also gives you access to 250 Qantas and partner and alliance airline lounges all over the world. (See Table 1, above, for locations of lounges in Australia).

The Blue Room is only for those travelling in Australia, except for passengers travelling internationally with Virgin Atlantic, who get access to the Sydney Blue Room free of charge.

Each Blue Room has a café and a bar — but unlike The Qantas Club or Rex, you have to pay for food and drink. (For services included in the cost of membership in The Blue Room see Table 1.) Anyone at the airport can use The Blue Room (subject to space) — if you're not a member you can pay a trial visit fee of \$5. Virgin Blue told us The Blue Room is going to change substantially in the next six months, but was unable to give us any details at the time this article went to press.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

"It's almost like insurance — you may not have to spend hours there, but if [you do], it's nice to know you'll have some quiet sanctuary for the term of your 'imprisonment'!"

Lu Hardy.

"Lounges in Australia were great ... in the US they were just terrible. [You] have to pay for drinks and can't even get a shower or a decent cup of tea."

Steve Ashfield.

Long-haul travel is where you'll really appreciate a safe, quiet space to stretch out and relax if you've got a long wait.

Not all international airlines offer paid membership to their lounges — we could only find airlines in Australia, the Czech Republic, New Zealand and countries in North America that did. With other airlines, lounge membership is reserved for their first and business-class passengers or high-status members of their frequent flyer programs.

The most obvious choice for Australians would be The Qantas Club, as membership gives users entrance to both domestic and international lounges. (See Table 2, page 24, for other airlines that offer membership for a fee).

You can also get Qantas Club membership through your frequent flyer status. For example, if you're a member of the Qantas Frequent Flyer program and earn a certain amount of status credits, you can reach silver, gold or platinum status. Silver entitles you to one complimentary invitation to the lounge, whereas gold and platinum cardholders get complimentary membership.

- * In addition to the paying member.
- (A) Jetstar customers who are members of The Qantas Club can also use the lounge.
- (B) Discounts are available for corporate membership.
- (C) Membership also entitles you to use Qantas and its alliance and partner lounges worldwide.
- (D) A partner must live at the same address as the primary member.
- (E) Not available for some partner or associated airlines.
- (F) No wireless hotspots available.
- (G) No showers available.
- (H) Virgin Blue will soon have a lounge in Adelaide.

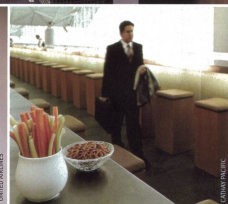
TABLE 1. DOMESTIC TRAVEL

Airline	Qantas (A); www.qantas.com.au	Regional Express (Rex); www.rex.com.au	Virgin Blue; www.virginblue.com.au
Name of lounge	The Qantas Club	REX Lounge	The Blue Room
Membership cost	\$685 one year (B) (C) or 130,000 Frequent Flyer points, \$970 two years, \$1530 four years, \$4200 life, \$2150 Senior Life, \$385 partner (yearly) (D), \$2595 partner (life), \$1330 partner (senior life)	\$265 per year	\$199 per year (B)
Guests allowed*	One; Platinum Qantas Frequent Flyers can have two guests in Australian and New Zealand domestic lounges (children under three aren't counted as a guest). Annual guest cards can be bought (\$200) for one extra guest.	Two; guest pass needed (\$5; children under 15 free)	One (children under three free); additional guests have to pay \$5
Privileges for members include	Priority reservations and waitlisting, dedicated check-in, priority baggage, flight announcements (E), personal travel profile (none of these privileges applies if you're travelling on Jetstar or Australian Airlines)	Complimentary membership to Frequent Flyer program.	One free return flight upgrade to 'Blue Zone' seats (seats with more leg room); \$50 vouchers to spend on food/beverage; express check-in if you have hand luggage only
Location of lounges	Adelaide, Alice Springs, Brisbane, Broome (F) (G), Cairns, Canberra, Darwin, Gold Coast, Hobart (G), Kalgoorlie (F) (G), Karratha (F) (G), Launceston (F) (G), Mackay (F) (G), Melbourne, Perth, Rockhampton (F) (G), Sydney (12 and 13), Townsville	Adelaide, Sydney (use Virgin Blue's The Blue Room in Melbourne)	Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne (H)
Free services available	Food and beverages (including alcohol), wireless hotspots, workstations including PC, phone and printer, fax, showers, rest rooms, TV, reading material	Phones, internet access, snacks, tea, coffee, soft drinks, beer and wine after 3 pm, reading materials, plasma TV	Sydney: Lounge area, reading materials, computers, photocopier (page limits apply), fax machine, workstations for laptops, digital TV, Sony Vega theatre, Playstation, wheelchair-accessible showers. Brisbane: As above, six meeting rooms (showers not wheelchair-accessible). Melbourne: As above, one meeting room, plus pool table and putting practice
Services user pays for	Hire of conference rooms; Sydney has a newsagency.		Café and bar



TABLE 2. INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

Airline / lounge	Air New Zealand Koro Club	American Airlines Admirals Club	Cathay Pacific The Marco Polo Club	Emirates	Malaysia Airlines Golden Lounges
Website (all www)	airnewzealand.com	aa.com	cathayairline.com	emirates.com.au	malaysiaairlines.com
Member of alliance group? (A) (B)	Star Alliance	Oneworld	Oneworld	Frequent flyer program shared with Sri Lankan Airlines	
Yearly membership cost (if applicable)	NZ\$495 (NZ\$365 for senior membership) (D)	US\$450 or 70,000 miles annually (one-day pass US\$50)	(F)	(F)	(F)
Life membership cost	Not available	Not available	(F)	(F)	(F)
International lounge access in Australia	Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney	Use The Qantas Club	One in Melbourne, use of The Qantas Club in Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth and Sydney	Brisbane, Melbourne (use Cathay Pacific's), Perth, Sydney	Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney (G)
Number of guests allowed (C)	Three (E) in NZ, one in countries outside NZ (must be flying with Air NZ)	Two, or a spouse and dependent children	One	One (must be flying with Emirates)	None



AIRLINES AND ALLIANCES

Qantas is a member of Oneworld, an alliance between eight airlines that entitles Qantas Club members to use the lounges of other Oneworld airlines (Table 2 lists which airlines are members). Some lounges owned by other Oneworld airlines may only be available to Qantas Club members two hours before your Qantas flight departs.

Qantas also has what it calls partner airlines — those whose lounges aren't exclusive to Qantas and Oneworld customers, so more airlines can use them. If the lounges are small and used by a number of airlines, they could get quite crowded.

Airlines such as Air New Zealand and Singapore Airlines belong to the Star Alliance (see Table 2 for other member airlines). If you're a member of a participating airline's lounge club or a Star Alliance Gold member (that is, you've clocked up lots of frequent flyer points flying with airlines in this alliance), you and a guest also travelling on a Star Alliance flight can use these lounges.

OTHER OPTIONS

Many international airports have facilities such as day rooms, showers, internet access, child change rooms and so forth available for anyone to use. Some of these facilities are free of charge while others cost.

VALUE FOR MONEY?

"I wouldn't like to pay for them because of the crowdedness, but as I get them as part of the ticket I'm quite happy to use them." Vicki Day.

"I'm very pleased with The Qantas Club — I would end up paying for it, just for recreational travel with my children. It's somewhere for parents to relax."

Cliff Zimmerman.

Qantas Club	Singapore Airlines Silver Kris Club	United Airlines Red Carpet Club
qantas.com.au	singaporeairlines.com	unitedairlines.com.au
Oneworld	Star Alliance	Star Alliance
685 (H) or 130,000 Frequent Flyer points	(F)	US\$500 or 70,000 miles (frequent flyer points)
4200 (825,000 points), junior: \$2150 (440,000 points)	\$245	Not available
Adelaide, Brisbane, Cairns, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney	Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney	Melbourne, Sydney
One (must be flying with Qantas, Australian Airlines or BA. Guests of Platinum Frequent Flyers just need to be flying that day) (J)	One (two for Solitaire PPS members)	Two in the US; one in countries outside the US, or a spouse and dependent children

- (A) Members of the Star Alliance are Air Canada, Air New Zealand, ANA, Asiana Airlines, Austrian Airlines, BMI, LOT Polish Airlines, Lufthansa, Scandinavian Airlines, Singapore Airlines, Spanair, TAP Portugal, Thai Airlines, United Airlines, US Airways and Varig Airlines.
- (B) Members of Oneworld are Aer Lingus, American Airlines, British Airways, Cathay Pacific, Finnair, Iberia, LAN and Qantas.
- (C) In addition to the paying member. Guests may not be admitted if the lounge is too full. As international lounges are airside, guests of lounge members need a valid airline ticket for that day.
- (D) Plus a one-off \$250 membership fee. Two-year membership is NZ\$870. The Koru Club no longer offers memberships for partners.
- (E) You have 10 guest passes a year with the Koru Club. You can buy an annual guest card for NZ\$250.
- (F) These airlines don't offer membership for a fee, only to first and business-class passengers and high-status members of each airline's frequent flyer program or alliance partner's program.
- (G) Adelaide passengers can use The Qantas Club.
- (H) See Table 1 for more details about rates for The Qantas Club.
- (I) An annual guest card is also available for \$230 if you want a guest to be with you on a regular basis.

So are they worth paying for? Most lounge users we spoke to thought they were good value if you travel a lot — especially if someone else, such as their company, was paying. Lounge users particularly liked being able to have a shower and freshen up after a long flight, and were most impressed by lounges in Asian destinations such as Hong Kong and Singapore. US lounges compared less favourably — some were described as “average”, “basic” and even “terrible”.

Domestic lounges were recommended mainly for the business traveller. Though most people seemed happy enough with the services the lounges provide, a common problem cited was overcrowding in many capital cities during peak times.

As an example of cost, if you paid for a yearly membership of The Qantas Club and travelled 20 times that year, entry would work out to be just over \$34 a visit. If your travel included long-haul flights

COMPETITION WOULD HELP

Matthew Zappulla's line of work requires him to travel an average of 20 times a year around Australia with Qantas, and about twice a year overseas with Qantas, British Airways or Cathay Pacific. Due to his Platinum Frequent Flyer status, his membership of The Qantas Club is free. He's been to lounges in all Australia's major cities and has used them in Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore, London, Amsterdam and Rome.

Matthew thinks lounges are almost a necessity for frequent business travellers. He often uses the business facilities, such as internet terminals and faxes, which he's been satisfied with. If he travelled less than six times a year and had to pay for membership himself, however, he'd “... spend the money at the terminal having a drink at the bar”.

Matthew says Qantas domestic lounges are all fairly similar, even all serving the same food. “While the Sydney lounge is impressive because of its size, Qantas domestic lounges are all fairly much the same.”

Overall, Matthew is a happy customer, but feels there's been a drop in service since Qantas lost its direct competitor, Ansett. He thinks lounges have become more crowded during peak times, notably in Canberra where, “You sometimes have the crazy situation where there are more people crammed into The Qantas Club lounge than outside in the terminal”.

For overseas frequent travellers, Matthew thinks lounge facilities like sleep rooms and showers are a real boon. He points out that airline lounges are generally excellent in the carrier's home country — the Cathay Pacific lounge in Hong Kong is particularly luxurious. “British Airways is also excellent at Heathrow — there's even a spa where you can get a massage. I've never had the time to use it, but apparently it's very good.”



with waiting times in between and you had work to do while waiting around for your flight, this would be a minor expense for the comfort and convenience.

Travelling the same amount of times domestically, The Blue Room ‘Passport’ (membership) would cost \$9.95 a visit. You'd need to fly more than 40 times a year for your membership with The Blue Room to be cheaper than the \$5 casual fee, although you do get other ‘free’ benefits if you're a member (see Table 1). And unlike The Qantas Club, which is available in 18 domestic airports, The Blue Room is only available in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney (and soon Adelaide).

If you're in a frequent flyer program, you can sometimes use the points to pay for your membership (see Table 2 for some airlines that do this). And if your travel is primarily business-related and you pay for membership yourself, the cost is tax-deductible. ■

Plus ça change...

... Digital set-top boxes with a 'personal video recorder': a throwback to VCR blues.

IN A NUTSHELL

- No set-top box in this test is easy to use, but some are better than others.
- Most in this test perform quite well technically.
- A set-top box with two tuners means you can record overlapping shows.

Just when the process of recording our favourite TV show had become a little less complicated than landing a lunar module, along comes digital TV and we're back dealing with poorly designed remote controls and complicated onscreen menus.

Digital TV, we're told, is an improvement on the current analogue system. It brings us pictures free of annoying ghosts, sound as clear as it is in the TV studio and some new channels.

If you want to receive digital TV broadcasts but still want to watch them on your old analogue TV, you need a set-top box (STB) — it converts the digital signal into analogue. All eight standard-definition set-top boxes in this test also have a hard disc drive (HDD) to allow you to record direct from digital broadcasts — you may see them referred to as personal video recorders (PVR) — but few of them make it easy. (And yes — we're firmly back in the world of acronyms too.)

WHAT TO BUY

NEXTWAVE PVR-2690	\$399
TOPFIELD TF4400PVRT	\$599
LEGEND LPVRC160	\$699
STRONG SRT 5390	\$499

The **NEXTWAVE** and **STRONG** are good value if you're willing to put up with just one digital TV tuner; both the **TOPFIELD** and **LEGEND** have two (hence their higher price). The **LEGEND** has almost double the claimed recording capacity of the **NEXTWAVE** and **TOPFIELD**; it's let down by some confusing onscreen controls.

All four performed well in our technical tests (see *On the technical side*, right) and while none has a good ease of use score, they're reasonably functional.

WHY WOULD YOU WANT ONE?

Assuming you've decided to join the digital revolution, you'll probably want the same convenience as in the analogue world when it comes to recording your favourite shows. Although none of the products in this test could be considered very easy to use, they do offer an important benefit over having a separate set-top box plus a DVD or video recorder.

In the latter scenario you need to make sure the STB is on and set to the right channel when you want to begin recording. Also, you have to make sure the DVD/video recorder is set to record from the STB, not its own analogue TV tuner. Given the difficulties many of us have just dealing with a VCR, it's probable that such a complicated set-up will result in many disappointments.

An STB with a hard drive means you don't have to co-ordinate two devices to record a program. Also, because its recordings are digital it doesn't degrade the sound or vision like a VCR. All the products in this test give excellent recorded results, and all have more recording time available than a DVD.

If you want to keep a version of a recording you can connect all the PVRs in this test up to a separate recorder. If you've recorded more than will normally fit on a DVD, a DVD recorder can increase the amount that fits on a disc by compressing the data (which lowers the quality).

Timeshift is a feature that lets you start to watch the beginning of a recording while the set-top box is still recording the end, or hit pause while you answer the phone and then watch from where you stopped while it carries on recording. It's pretty much a standard feature now and is available on all the products in the test.

ON THE TECHNICAL SIDE

Reception in the digital world tends to be either on or off. We tested these products to see how well they cope when TV signals aren't perfect. In general, all except the **DGTEC** are reasonably good (see the table, page 28, for scores).

The **DGTEC** has trouble with weak VHF signals and wouldn't be a good choice if your normal reception is poor. In contrast, the **HUMAX** and **DIGICRYSTAL** managed to hang onto poor signals in situations where the others had given up.

DIGITAL COMPLICATIONS

You don't hear much about the complications of digital TV: dozens of channels with nothing on them (which change name depending on what's being broadcast)

are really radio with pictures, or are electronic program guides (EPG) that currently just don't work. Some commentators have suggested the EPG will be the salve for all our digital ills. Basically it's a channel that displays at least a week's upcoming program information for each channel available in your region. Your set-top-box can use this information to automatically set up recording.

If an EPG worked, it could reduce the pain of setting up a recording to pressing one or two buttons, even if you wanted to record a program every time it was on or the program was rescheduled. Unfortunately the TV networks can't agree on a standard format, so it's only a theory at present.

EPG aside, when you add aspect ratios, high-definition channels that may or may not be viewable on your screen, broadcast area limitations and the potential need for upgrades to the PVR's operating system to fix software glitches, it's not really surprising that consumers are largely sticking with analogue TV for the time being.

Video connections

Here's a guide to some different kinds of video connection from the set-top box to your TV and what they're used for (note that, apart from SCART, they all require separate audio connections). Your TV needs the equivalent input capability to receive each kind of output.

■ **Composite** is found on most modern TVs. The brightness and colour signals are combined into a single video signal. All the models in this test have at least one composite output connection via either SCART (see below) or the more common single cable. Most have more than one.

■ **S-video** is identifiable by a small, round, four-pin plug. It provides better picture quality than composite because the brightness and colour signals are kept separate. All the tested set-top boxes have S-video output.

■ **Component** separates the picture further into brightness and colour signals, providing even better quality. Three video cables are required if there's no SCART option. Only the **DGTEC**, **FORCE**, **LEGEND** and **TOPFIELD** can deliver component output.

■ **SCART** is also known as a Euroconnector. It's a 21-pin connector that can carry a number of different analogue video signals as well as sound. Most of the products in this test have two rear SCART connections; the **DIGICRYSTAL** has only one and the **DGTEC** has none.

None of the tested models has a digital output. All have an input connection, so they can be updated from a computer, but none can accept input from a digital camera — they're limited to recording from broadcast TV only.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE			COMPONENTS OF EASE OF USE SCORE				SPECIFICATIONS	
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Technical performance score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	Remote control score (%)	Onscreen menus score (%)	Tuning and set-up score (%)	Front panel score (%)	4 Tuners	Hard disc capacity (GB)
NEXTWAVE PVR-2690	65	74	56	40	70	65	35	1	80
TOPFIELD TF4400PVRt	63	68	58	40	75	75	20	2	80
LEGEND LPVR160	62	72	52	40	60	65	35	2	160
STRONG SRT 5390	61	71	51	40	60	65	30	1	120
FORCE 530T	55	63	47	50	40	60	30	1	80
HUMAX PVR-8000T	54	66	42	45	30	70	35	1	80
DGTEC DG-S080PVR	52	48	55	30	75	75	35	2	80
DIGICRYSTAL SOT-9000PVR	48	63	32	10	50	40	40	1	80

What to look for

Based on our assessments of the tested models, currently you may look for some of these features when shopping around for a set-top box/PVR but be lucky to find them.

- A remote control that fits neatly in your hand and allows you to reach the most used buttons easily. Buttons should be in logical groupings (all the recording and playback functions together, for example), have distinctive shapes so you can recognise them in the dark and be well spaced and large enough so you don't press the wrong one by mistake.
- Onscreen menus that are easy to read and have a logical sequence. You should be able to control their opacity if they 'float' over the broadcast picture. The **FORCE** and **STRONG** display the broadcast picture in a small window within the menu, and you can't see it at all when using the **HUMAX** menus.
- Automatic tuning should be reasonably quick and simple to operate, because as new channels are introduced you may need to redo it.
- Favourite channel selection and set-up should be straightforward because there'll be lots of channels you'll probably want to ignore most of the time.
- Some basic front panel controls, so you're not completely lost if you lose the remote or it stops functioning.
- A front panel display that shows the channel, time and what function the box is currently engaged in, as a minimum. Most in this test are very limited.

■ Enough connections to allow you to connect all the devices you want to use with the STB.

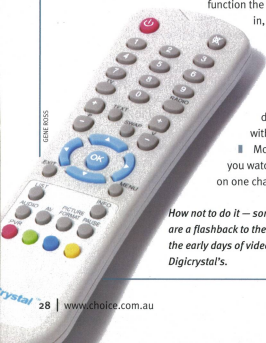
■ More than one TV tuner lets you watch a digital broadcast on one channel while recording

another (effectively like watching one channel on TV while recording another on your VCR), or record two programs on different channels at the same time — handy if their broadcasts overlap. You could record a digital channel with the STB's single TV tuner and watch an analogue broadcast, but that sort of defeats the purpose of going digital in the first place.

USEFUL FEATURES

All the tested models have the following features, unless otherwise noted.

- Menu-operated options for 4:3 letterbox, 4:3 pan & scan and widescreen 16:9 shape settings.
- Program and channel information briefly displayed onscreen.
- User-set duration control for channel display (except the **STRONG**).
- Automatic tuning — search for and tune to all broadcasts found.
- Manual tuning — search for and tune to particular broadcasts.
- 'Favourites' to find favourite channels (except the **DIGICRYSTAL**).
- Channel erase — permanently remove unwanted channels (except the **LEGEND** and **FORCE**).
- Timeshift (see page 27).
- Simple recording — press REC to begin and STOP to end (except the **DIGICRYSTAL**, which has no REC button on its remote).
- Timer recording — you can set the channel, date, start time and duration or end time.
- Electronic program guide (EPG) recording — a program can be marked in the EPG to be recorded, assuming there's ever an EPG that works (except the **DIGICRYSTAL** and **STRONG**).
- System settings lock — prevents unauthorised changes to some of the box's settings (except the **DIGICRYSTAL**).
- Channel up and down scrolling keys on the front panel (except the **DGTEC**).
- Closed captions (onscreen subtitles) and teletext — it's a requirement of the Australian standard that receivers be capable of closed captions and teletext.
- On and off timer (except the **DIGICRYSTAL**, **DGTEC** and **TOPFIELD**).
- Reset the settings back to factory defaults.
- TV/radio button on remote (except the **DGTEC**). STBs also act as digital radio receivers, but there are only a few radio channels available at present.



How not to do it — some of the remote controls are a flashback to the worst examples of the early days of video recorders. This is the Digicrystal's.

Max. recording (hrs)	Dimensions (H x W x D, mm)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)**
	65 x 340 x 265	1	Korea	NextWave Digital	399
	65 x 340 x 272	1	Korea	Topfield	599
	71 x 370 x 284	1	Korea	Legend Digital	699
	66 x 335 x 290	1	Korea	Strong	499
	70 x 369 x 252	2	Scandinavia	Force	399
	69 x 369 x 264	1	Korea	Humax	499
	71 x 420 x 333	2	Malaysia	DGTEC	599
	44 x 280 x 209	1	China	ADVT	229

ADVT Australian Digital Vision Technology.

* Measurements include all protruding parts other than the power cord.

** Prices are recommended retail, as supplied by the manufacturers in March 2006.

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the following scores:

- Technical performance: 50%
- Ease of use: 50%

2 Technical performance

Tests determined the product's ability to maintain reception in good and poor conditions. The latter includes common problems such as interference from other electrical appliances and multiple signals bouncing off

objects, which will usually cause 'ghosting' in analogue systems.

3 Ease of use

A combination of the following scores:

- Remote control: 40%
- Onscreen menus: 40%
- Tuning and set-up: 15%
- Front panel: 5%

See *What to look for*, far left, for more detail.

4 Tuners

The number of digital TV tuners (see *What to look for* for more on this).

5 Maximum recording time

The manufacturers' claimed maximum hours of possible recording. In normal use this time will vary depending on the type of material being recorded. Usually detailed or fast-moving scenes require more space.

PHOTOS: GENE BOSS

Profiles

Models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order.

NEXTWAVE PVR-2690

Price: \$399

GOOD POINTS

- Best overall and technical performance scores.
- Second best for ease of use.

BAD POINTS

- Playback controls on the remote are small, and it has some buttons too closely spaced.
- Front panel controls don't include some basic functions
- The front panel indicator is limited in what it displays.
- The 'favourites' function is a bit confusing.

TOPFIELD TF4400PVRT

Price: \$599

GOOD POINTS

- The easiest to use — equal best for onscreen menus and 'favourites'.
- Two TV tuners.
- Component video output.

BAD POINTS

- The remote has a number of very small, closely spaced buttons, and some icons and arrangements aren't intuitive.
- The front panel indicator is limited in what it displays.
- Front panel controls don't include some basic functions or allow access to onscreen menus.

LEGEND LPVRC160

Price: \$699

GOOD POINTS

- Good technical performance.
- Two TV tuners.
- The biggest hard disc, with the longest claimed recording time.
- Manual has instructions on upgrading the hard disc.
- Component video output.

BAD POINTS

- Playback controls on the remote are small, and it has some buttons too closely spaced.
- Front panel controls don't include some basic functions.
- The 'favourites' function is a bit confusing.
- Onscreen display navigation is sometimes confusing.

STRONG SRT 5390

Price: \$499

GOOD POINTS

- Second largest hard disc, with a probably conservative claimed recording time.
 - Good technical performance.
- #### BAD POINTS
- Playback controls on the remote are small and some buttons too closely spaced.
 - The onscreen display takes up almost the entire screen and the live picture is displayed in a small window.
 - Front panel controls don't include some basic functions.
 - The front panel indicator is limited in what it displays.
 - The 'favourites' function is a bit confusing.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

The FORCE, HUMAX and DIGICRYSTAL all scored less than 50% for ease of use and would probably frustrate many people trying to use them, while the DGTEC only scored 48% for technical performance. In particular it has trouble with weak VHF signals.

NEXTWAVE PVR-2690



TOPFIELD TF4400PVRT

LEGEND LPVRC160



STRONG SRT 5390



It could have been weeks
since it was squeezed.

How fresh is your OJ?



IN A NUTSHELL

- Chilled orange juice can be from around three weeks to almost three months old when it reaches its best-before date.
- None of the best-liked OJs was made from concentrate.

What makes chilled orange juice different from the stuff that doesn't need refrigeration (apart from the price)? You might think it's fresher or even, given some of the ads and product names, freshly squeezed.

If so, it could come as something of a shock to discover that some of these juices can still sit around for months between when they're juiced and their best-before date.

About a month to a month and a half is typical, although one brand we looked at can hang around for nearly three. When we bought these juices at random in supermarkets, most were two to four weeks old. Very few were less than a week since processing.

In fact many of these chilled juices are reconstituted orange juice instead of, or as well as, fresh juice. The table has details of which is which.

So most of these juices aren't 'fresh' in the usual sense of the word — and none specifically claims to be. However, the name of the product can be as important as a claim. The ACCC recently made what's now called **JUST DELICIOUS** change its name from **JUST SQUEEZED**, which it ruled to be misleading because the product contains reconstituted juice.

The juices on supermarket shelves that don't need refrigeration before opening are pasteurised and then hot-filled into the bottles, so a sterile product goes in. Many of the chilled juices we looked at are also pasteurised, but generally only lightly, and they're cold-filled. The more severe the pasteurisation, the longer the juice will last. Only **GROVE** and **COLES FARMLAND** told

Chilled orange juice (no added sugar)
(in rank order from best to least liked)*

ORIGINAL JUICE COMPANY Black Label Chilled	81	✓
COLES with Pulp (A)	69	✓
GROVE Juice of Orange	68	
GOLDEN CIRCLE Premium Chilled Juice (B)	66	✓
ORIGINAL JUICE COMPANY Premium (A)	66	✓
DAILY JUICE COMPANY (A)	63	
BERRI Australian Fresh (A)	59	✓
GOLDEN CIRCLE No Added Sugar Chilled	58	
IGA Country Grove	58	
ORCHY Premium	52	
FRUITOPIA Classic Premium	43	
JUST DELICIOUS (C)	43	
MR JUICY	42	
MACQUARIE VALLEY	42	
COLES FARMLAND No Added Sugar (D)	28	

1 Taste score (%)	Preservation free
81	✓
69	✓
68	
66	✓
66	✓
63	
59	✓
58	
58	
52	
43	
43	
42	
42	
28	

us that they don't pasteurise their juice, preferring to use a preservative instead. Many juices use both methods.

TASTE TEST

We asked 50 orange juice drinkers to taste a selection of nationally available chilled orange juices. One thing we wanted to find out was whether juices labelled 'premium' or 'black label' were worth the extra money they often command. Three of these did very well but two were well down the table. So you can't rely on a 'premium' label to ensure you get a great-tasting juice.

One of the most expensive juices, **THE ORIGINAL JUICE COMPANY Black Label** (\$4.77/2 L), came out streets ahead with 81% in the taste test. The tasters generally liked its thick, pulpy consistency, so if pulp isn't your favourite thing you might not be as keen (some tasters found it too pulpy).

Following it were four juices that were quite well liked, but none is particularly cheap. None of these best-liked juices is made from concentrate, so that may be one factor giving them a head-start for taste.



NO ADDED SUGAR

All the juices tasted had no added sugar, but when we compared their labels to similar varieties with sugar added, the difference in nutrition was very small.

All juice, added sugar or not, can be a significant source of kilojoules and sugar if you drink a lot. All the juices have added vitamin C and claim to give you twice as much as the average person needs each day in a large glass (200 mL), so you don't need to guzzle down several glasses to get enough. And juice isn't a substitute for fresh fruit. It doesn't have the important fibre content of whole fresh fruit, so you still need to get at least two serves of fruit a day as well as your juice.

Buying Aussie oranges

With our complicated and non-intuitive country of origin labelling it's not always easy to work out where a food product comes from if you want to. Australian orange growers have set up a new logo to let consumers know that a juice has been made from Australian oranges, with no reconstituted or imported juice (see above). You should start to see it appearing on juices, with some **GOLDEN CIRCLE** and **GROVE** juices among the first off the rank.



Here's a rundown of what the current country of origin labelling means:

■ **Product/Produce of Australia:** Each significant ingredient must come from Australia and all (or virtually all) of the processing, production and manufacture must happen here too. So for OJ that's Australian oranges, juiced and packed in Australia.

■ **Made in Australia:** The product must have been "substantially transformed" in Australia and at least 50% of production costs must be in Australia too. So a simple 'Made in Australia' claim doesn't necessarily mean the oranges were Australian. As a guide to what the 'made in' claim can mean, diluting orange juice concentrate with water to make juice doesn't meet the "substantially transformed" criterion, while juicing the oranges from fresh does.

Contains concentrate	Contains Australian juice	Contains imported juice	2 Time from juicing to best- before (days)	Sugars (%)*	Energy (kJ / 100 mL)**	Price (\$ / 2 L)†
✓			35-40	8.0	180	4.77 (E)
✓			45	7.5	140	3.99
✓			28	7.5	140	3.95
✓			45	7.5	170	3.98
✓		✓	45	7.5	170	3.99
✓	✓		28	8.0	160	4.99
✓	✓		28	8.0	160	4.99
✓	✓	✓	45	8.0	180	3.98
✓	✓	✓	25	8.0	160	4.11
✓	✓	✓	84	9.0	190	6.26 (F)
✓	✓	✓	37	8.0	180	4.69
✓	✓	✓	35	7.0	140	4.99
✓	✓	✓	42	8.0	160	2.59 (G)
✓	✓	✓	70	6.0	140	4.89
✓	✓	✓	42	8.0	160	2.69

* We tasted a range of juices that are nationally available in major supermarkets. Not all available juices were included. Homebrand from Woolworths/Safeway was tasted but has since been reformulated.

** Sugars are rounded to the nearest 0.5% and kJ to the nearest 10.

† This is the price we paid for 2 L in supermarkets in February 2006. Where the product came in a size other than 2 L, we bought the closest and calculated the price.

(A) Also available in a pulp-free variety. We tasted the regular (with pulp) version.

(B) Golden Circle produces a product with this name in both a carton and a bottle, but they're not the same product. We tasted the carton version as it has no added sugar and so is more similar to the other products in the taste test. The bottled juice also contains imported, reconstituted juice.

(C) Previously called Just Squeezed.

(D) The 2 L product has a different supplier in Queensland.

(E) Price calculated from 1.5 L bottle.

(F) No longer available in 2 L bottles; we paid \$3.13 for 1 L.

(G) No longer available in 2 L cartons, only 300 mL and 500 mL from delis, etc.

1 Taste score

We asked 50 people to each taste five brands of chilled orange juice and tell us how much they liked them, giving a score out of 10, which was converted to a percentage. At least 15 people tasted each juice.

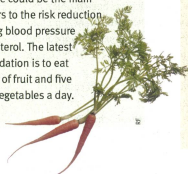
Many of these juices may vary in taste with the season.

2 Time from juicing to best before

We asked manufacturers to tell us the number of days between their juices being processed and the best-before date on the container.

STROKE PREVENTION

Here's more evidence for the benefits of including lots of fruit and veg in your diet. A study in the UK has found that people who eat five or more portions of fruit and veg a day reduce the risk of suffering a stroke by 26%, compared to those who have less than three servings. It's thought potassium and dietary fibre could be the main contributors to the risk reduction by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol. The latest recommendation is to eat two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables a day.

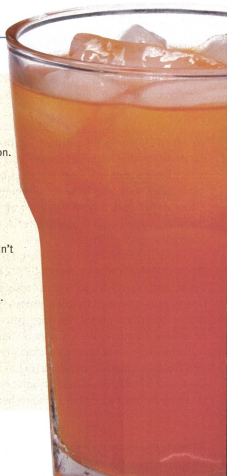


Benzene in soft drink

Nutritionally soft drinks don't have much going for them, and the latest findings may have uncovered another reason to think about limiting our consumption.

The Food Standards Agency in the UK recently reported on the results of tests conducted for the presence of benzene — a cancer-causing chemical — in soft drink. It's produced when sodium benzoate, a preservative used to prevent the growth of mould, interacts with ascorbic acid (vitamin C). Most tests didn't detect benzene or only found minuscule levels, but four brands of soft drink (all fruit-flavoured drinks not available in Australia) were recalled due to high levels.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand will also be conducting tests on soft drinks and juices to check the extent of this problem, if any, in Australia. In the meantime its advice is to observe healthy eating guidelines, and continue to drink soft drinks in moderation. We'll keep you posted.



Selenium: ignore the hype

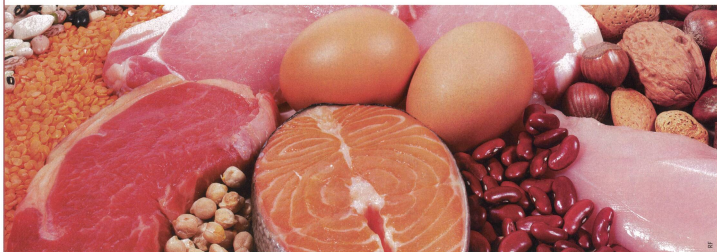
Selenium is a mineral found in cereals, meat, fish and eggs, and it's receiving considerable attention because of its ability to act as an antioxidant, potentially protecting the body against damage to the body's cells by free radicals, which can cause cancer and other health conditions.

Food manufacturers are taking advantage of the positive press selenium has been getting, and are marketing products with increased selenium levels. Wheat grown in selenium-rich soils is being used to make products such as bread. Interestingly, though, the Cancer Council NSW, in its *Position statement on selenium and cancer prevention*, suggests that currently the evidence for the protective role of selenium in cancers (other than perhaps prostate

and colorectal) is weak and inconsistent. While studies on the benefits of selenium are promising, more research is required.

Not getting enough selenium can also result in malnutrition disorders and gum disease, but deficiency is rare in Australia and there's seldom a need to take a supplement. And too much selenium is toxic, so taking supplements is potentially dangerous — it isn't recommended at all for people under 15.

For now, ignore the hype: you'll get as much selenium as you need from a balanced diet that's rich in cereals and grains and includes a few serves each of fish and meat each week, without resorting to special breads and other processed foods, or supplements.



For many people, ironing is one of the most hated household chores. Whether you're trying to manoeuvre around the buttons on a cotton shirt or battling to get the creases out of a linen skirt, most people would just rather be doing something else.

While we can't promise to make ironing more enjoyable, hopefully these top picks will at least make it a little easier.

THE TEST

A group of experienced ironers rated 11 steam irons priced between \$49 and \$130 for their effectiveness at removing wrinkles and creases from cotton, denim and synthetic material, for how well their shot of steam and water spray features worked and how easy they were to use.

The results were varied, and overall the cheapest models didn't perform as well as the more expensive ones. But we found that it's still possible to get a good iron for around \$60.

IN A NUTSHELL

- While some of the \$100+ models came out on top, you can still get a good iron for \$60.
- If you're worried about accidentally leaving your iron on, look for a model with auto shut-off.

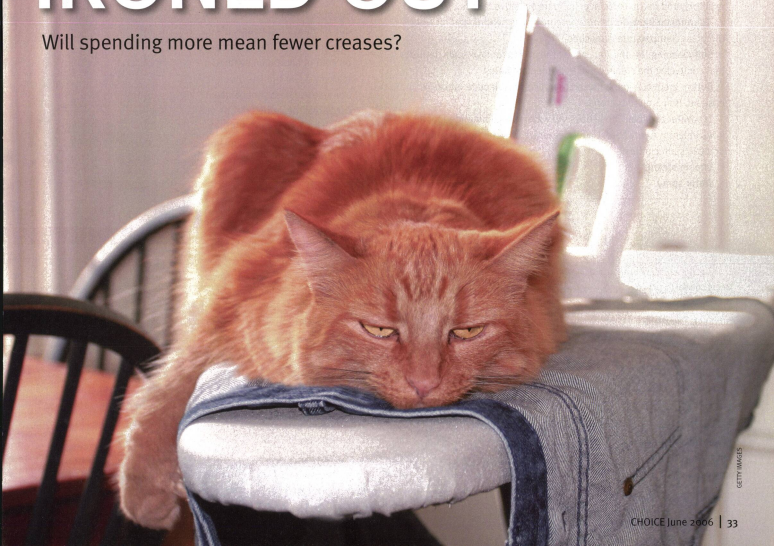
WHAT TO BUY

PHILIPS Azur Precise GC 4330	\$120
SUNBEAM Ultra Resilium SR5900	\$119
BRAUN Freestyle SI 6250	\$80
SUNBEAM Ultra Platinum SR5500	\$60

While the top three were very highly rated, if you don't want to spend that much on an iron, the **SUNBEAM Ultra Platinum** at \$60 ironed well for a lower price.

IRONED OUT

Will spending more mean fewer creases?



What to look for

- **Weight:** A light iron is easy to move but needs more downward pressure, while a heavier one needs less pressure but takes more effort to move and lift. It's largely a matter of personal preference.
- **Soleplate:** A non-stick soleplate is generally easier to keep clean than a stainless steel one, but you need to be careful not to scratch it (for example on zips). Scratches may cause the iron to 'drag' over time.
- **Vertical steam:** Allows you to iron heavy items like curtains, or clothes like a suit jacket, while they're hanging up.
- **Auto shut-off:** Cuts off power to the iron after it's been left standing for a certain length of time. If it's left in a horizontal position the cut-off time is usually around 20–30 seconds, if upright it's much longer.
- **Power-on light:** A safety feature that shows you the iron's on and therefore hot.
- **Cord storage:** A specially designed heel to wrap the cord around.
- **Cord length:** It's safer and easier to have an iron with a cord long enough to reach the power point, rather than use an extension cord.

FEATURES ALL THE TESTED MODELS HAVE

- **Variable steam:** Allows you to control the amount of steam while you iron, so you can turn it up when trying to get creases out of linen, for example, and use a lower level for more sensitive fabrics.
- **Thermostat light:** Turns on when the iron is heating and off when the preset temperature is reached.
- **Self-cleaning:** Means you can set the iron to remove scale deposits that could clog the steam valve and soleplate holes.
- **Button groove:** A gap between the iron and soleplate makes it easier to iron around buttons.
- **Tap water capable:** These days tap water is recommended for all irons unless it's very hard. Using freezer ice or water from a softening unit can stain clothes.
- **Shot of steam.**
- **Water spray.**

Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in r

PHILIPS AZUR PRECISE GC 4330

Price: \$120

The equal best performer overall, our trialists found it very easy to use and the best in the test for getting creases out of cotton and denim. It also has automatic shut-off in case you leave it standing for several minutes (or rest it too long on something you're ironing). But at 1.9 kg it's also the heaviest iron on trial, and several people found it too heavy even though it glided easily over the clothes.



SUNBEAM ULTRA RESILIUM SR5900

Price: \$119

Equal best performer overall and one of the easiest to use. It's very good at ironing denim, good on cotton, and OK on synthetic materials. Our trialists thought this iron had the best shot of steam in the test, described by one as "strong — had gusto". It's very easy to fill and manoeuvre and has automatic shut-off.



Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE			4 FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS	
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Ironing score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	Soleplate type	Vertical steam	Auto shut-off (vertical / horizontal, min:sec)	Power-on light	Cord storage	Cord length (m)	Weight (kg)
PHILIPS Azur Precise GC 4330	82	82	81	Non-stick	✓	7:50 / 0:30	✓	✓	3.1	1.9
SUNBEAM Ultra Resilium SR5900	82	81	82	Non-stick	✓	14:55 / 0:27	✓	✓	3.1	1.7
BRAUN Freestyle SI 6250	81	79	82	Non-stick	(B)			✓	2.2	1.5
SUNBEAM Ultra Platinum SR5500	76	74	77	Non-stick	✓		✓	✓	3.1	1.5
BRAUN Freestyle SI 6595	75	70	79	Stainless steel	(B)	15:05 / 0:30		✓	2.2	1.6
TEFAL Ultraglide Diffusion 80 FV4180 (A)	73	68	77	Non-stick	✓			✓	2.3	1.5
PHILIPS Elance GC 3106	69	63	74	Non-stick				✓	3.1	1.6
BREVILLE Jet Select S52030	66	68	64	Non-stick	✓		✓	✓	3.0	1.8
MORPHY RICHARDS Turbosteam 40660	64	60	68	Non-stick	✓			✓	2.1	1.6
MISTRAL Smart Steam MI200	56	57	55	Non-stick	✓	7:25 / 0:20		✓	3.1	1.8
KAMBROOK Steamline KI940	55	45	64	Stainless steel	✓	8:0 / 0:30			3.1	1.4



BRAUN FREESTYLE SI 6250

Price: \$80

One of the lighter irons in the test and also one of the easiest to use. It's very easy to fill and manoeuvre and very comfortable to hold and use, though its cord is comparatively short. It's also very good at getting creases out of cotton and denim. One trialist summed it up as a "good, practical, easy-to-use and lightweight iron".



SUNBEAM ULTURA PLATINUM SR5500

Price: \$60

A good overall performer and cheaper than the top three models. It's very good at ironing denim and good on cotton and synthetic materials. It's very easy to fill and its water spray and shot of steam are very effective. It's also one of the lighter irons in the test.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The **BRAUN Freestyle SI 6595** scored relatively well overall, is easy to use and has automatic shut-off. But it costs more than all the models in the *What to buy* list so, unless you find it on special, you'd be better with one of the top ones.
- The **TEFAL Ultraglide Diffusion 80** didn't iron quite as well as the models in the *What to buy* list, but it's still a good option and is reasonably priced. It's one of the easiest irons to manoeuvre and the opening to the water tank slides out, which some trialists preferred to the regular filling devices.
- The **PHILIPS Elance** performed reasonably well overall but several trialists complained of an irritating whistling sound when they used the shot of steam. We bought another one to check it wasn't just a faulty sample and found it also made the same noise.
- The **BREVILLE Jet Select** and **MISTRAL Smart Steam** are both relatively heavy, though the **BREVILLE** irons much better. Some trialists felt these irons would be too heavy to use for long periods.
- Most of the trialists found the **MORPHY RICHARDS Turbosteam** leaked water.
- The **KAMBROOK Steamline** got a poor score for ironing, particularly for cotton shirts, and most trialists said they wouldn't buy it. "Very easy to use but it couldn't iron," said one.

BORED WITH IRONING?

Then you might want to give 'extreme ironing' a go. Started by one fed-up English ironer nine years ago, participants in this 'sport' do their ironing while, for example, climbing a mountain or canoeing down a river. Some Aussie devotees have even managed to do a spot of ironing while scuba diving (though we think this may defeat the object). According to the Extreme Ironing Bureau, the experience combines "the danger and excitement of an 'extreme' sport with the satisfaction of a well pressed shirt". You can check it out at www.extremeironing.com.

IRONING TIPS

- Put your ironing board cover on the board while it's still damp and let it dry in place for a better fit.
- To prevent collars, cuffs and hems from puckering, iron them on the wrong side first.

	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$)*
apire	2	Breville	120
ha	2	Sunbeam	119
in	2	Braun	80
na	2	Sunbeam	60
in	2	Braun	130
nce	1	Groupe SEB	70
apire	2	Breville	60
na	2	Breville	50
na	2	Asko	49
na	3	Mistral	50
na	1	Kambrook	50

* Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in April 2006, or the price we paid in January 2006.

(A) To be discontinued by July 2006.

(B) Its 'power shot' function gives a similar effect to vertical steam.

1 Overall score

This is made up of:

- Ironing score: 50%
- Ease of use score: 50%

2 Ironing score

Twelve regular ironers trialled the irons on a cotton shirt, denim jeans and synthetic fabric, and gave them a rating. The trialists considered the effectiveness of

the irons at removing wrinkles and creases, as well as the effectiveness of their shot of steam and water spray functions.

They first ironed the items at the recommended setting and then could iron them a second time at a different heat setting if they thought it would improve the result.

3 Ease of use

Trialists took into consideration:

- How easy it was to fill the water tank.

- How easy it was to manoeuvre the iron over the clothes.

- How easy it was to use the water spray and steam functions.
- How comfortable the iron was to hold and use.
- How easy it was to read and change the controls.

4 Features

See *What to look for*, far left, for more on the features in the table.

THANK YOU

We'd like to thank The Smith Family for lending us 72 pairs of denim jeans for the trial.

Fan's best

A fan helps provide an even and stable room temperature.

IN A NUTSHELL

- On test: Eight column heaters from \$90 to \$299 with 2400 W maximum heat output, making them suitable for a large bedroom or small living area — depending on where you live and how well insulated your home is.
- The only fan-assisted model clearly outperformed the others.

The traditional column heater design relies on natural convection: the heated air rises and is replaced by cooler air. This creates a natural airflow that distributes the warm air in the room.

Compared to fan-assisted types of electric heater, though, it's a fairly slow process, and column heaters are best suited for areas that require heating for long periods rather than occasional fast heating.

However, some column heater models now also come with a fan, such as the **DIMPLEX OFC2411TIF** in this test. With its fan on, it clearly outperformed the other models. And you want to make sure you use it that way — when we tested it without the fan, it didn't manage to raise the average temperature in our test room by 10°C, and its heat distribution was much less even.

The fan is reasonably quiet, but could still require you to talk a bit louder or turn the TV volume up a notch when it's on.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE				5 FEATURES					5 SPECIFICATIONS			
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Heating score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Safety tests	Frost watch	Timer	Thermal cutout	Tilt switch	Heat settings	Dimensions (L x H x D, cm)*	Weight (kg)†	Cord length (m)‡	Warranty (years)
DIMPLEX OFC2411TIF (A)	76 (A)	80 (A)	65	(C)	✓	✓ (E)	✓		2 (F)	60 x 64 x 16	18.5	1.3	2
CELSIUS OHC2400T (B)	72	72	73	Pass		✓		✓	3	51 x 65 x 15	12.6	1.9	1
SUNAIR OHS2400T (B)	72	72	73	Pass		✓		✓	3	51 x 65 x 15	12.6	1.9	1
DIMPLEX ROF24T1	70	70	70	Pass	✓	✓	✓	✓	7	75 x 61 x 18	17.7	1.5	2
DIMPLEX ROF24ECC	68	66	73	Pass	✓	✓ (E)	✓	✓	3	75 x 61 x 19	17.4	1.5	2
DE'LONGHI TRD2400T	66	65	68	Pass	✓	✓	✓	✓	3	57 x 66 x 16	18.7	2.1	ns
DE'LONGHI RTR2400	62	68	49	Pass	✓	✓	✓	✓	2	56 x 65 x 16	17.6	2.1	ns
TECO NY24CT11L	60	55	73	(D)		✓	✓	✓	3	56 x 65 x 15	15.7	1.8	1

* Rounded to the nearest 1 cm, 0.1 kg and 0.1 m, respectively.

** Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in May 2006. Prices can vary a lot, so shop around.

ns Not stated.

(A) Without the fan, the heating score is 62%, and the overall score 63%.

(B) These models are technically identical. Only the Sunair was tested;

it's also available without a timer (OHS2400, \$80).

(C) Didn't switch off when laid on its side.

(D) Fell over when tilted to 15° in our stability test.

(E) Electronic timer; the rest are mechanical.

(F) Has three heat settings without the fan.

1 Overall score

This is a combination of the heating (70%) and ease of use (30%) scores.

2 Heating score

The heaters were assessed in a thermal comfort lab for the following:

- **Heating speed:** How long does it take to raise the room temperature by 5°C and 10°C?
- **Heat distribution:** How evenly does it heat the room?

- **Thermostat performance:** How well does its thermostat maintain a selected room temperature?

3 Ease of use score

We assessed the following:

- Use of controls.
- Visibility and clarity of markings.
- Ease of cleaning.
- Cord storage.
- Mobility.

WHAT TO BUY

Models are profiled in rank order. Shop around — we found that prices vary a lot.

DIMPLEX OFC2411TF

Price: \$179

Good points

- The best heating performance when used with its fan. In particular, it provides the most even heat distribution around the room, and keeps the room temperature very stable.
- Has a humidifier tank, which you fill with water that evaporates during heating, preventing the air in the room from becoming too dry.

Bad points

- Comparatively poor performer when used without its fan.
- Didn't switch off when laid on its side (no tilt switch).
- Relatively short power cord.
- One castor and the humidifier tank kept falling off during our tests.



CELSIUS OHC2400T

SUNAIR OHS2400T

Price: \$90

These models are technically identical; only the **SUNAIR** was tested.

Good points

- Fast to heat up a room.
- The most even heat distribution around the room of the models without a fan.

Bad points

- The thermostat allows comparatively large temperature fluctuations.



DIMPLEX ROF24TI

Price: \$279

Good points

- Achieves comparatively even heat distribution.
- Maintains very stable room temperature.

Bad points

- The cord storage cover kept falling off.



WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

- The **DIMPLEX ROF24ECC** has an electronic thermostat and timer, and a remote control. It took the longest to heat up the test room, and didn't keep the room temperature as stable as some of the other models.
- The other three models didn't distribute the heat very evenly, and the **TECO** didn't even raise the temperature in our test room by 10°C.

Manufacturer / Price (\$)**	
De'Longhi	179
AF Control	90
AF Control	90
De'Longhi	279
De'Longhi	299
De'Longhi	299
De'Longhi	249
De'Longhi	189

4 Safety tests

We carried out a number of electrical safety and surface temperature tests required by the Australian standard — all the models passed. We also put them through a:

■ Stability or tilt test:

This requires the heater not to tip over when tilted to an angle of 15°. We also laid the heaters on their sides and checked whether a tilt switch or thermal cutout switches them off.

■ **Towel test:** A towel is draped over the heater while it's turned to its highest setting. This simulates what could happen if a towel or clothing were accidentally dropped or left on it. Ideally, a thermal cutout should protect the heater from being damaged, and the towel from catching fire. None of the tested models switched off during this test, but none sustained any damage either.

5 Features and specifications

■ **Thermostat:** This maintains a desired average room temperature (as long as it's within the heater's capacity), and should have a control that's easy to read and set. All the tested models have one.

■ **Frost watch:** This is claimed to maintain a temperature of about 5°C if the thermostat is left on its lowest setting, avoiding frost. We didn't test this feature but it's a good idea for colder climates.

■ A **thermal cutout** and/or **tilt switch** is meant to prevent the heater from overheating.

■ **Cord length:** These heaters aren't supposed to be used with an extension cord — it may get hot and pose a fire hazard.

■ **Origin:** All the tested heaters are made in China.

WANT MORE INFO?

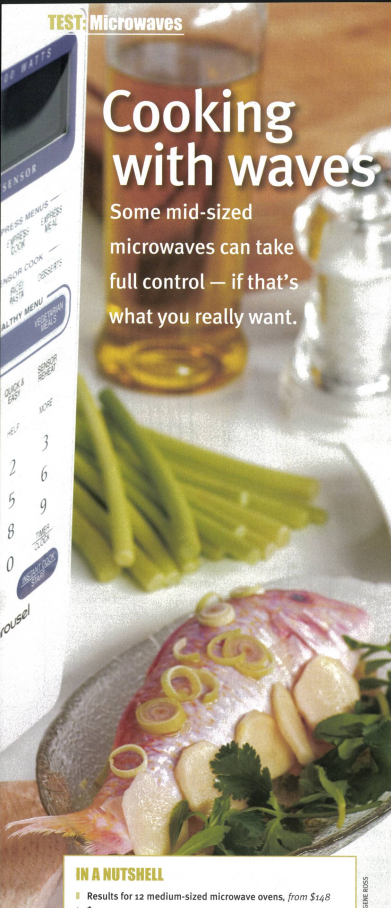
For more heating information, check the following articles (all listed under 'Heaters' in the index) on www.choiceextra.com.au:

■ **Your heating options** tells you the pros and cons of gas and electricity for heating, and which heater type is most suitable for which heating task.

■ Our interactive **electric heater database** is available for a limited time too. It contains information on prices, features and specifications (but no test results) for over 200 models, as provided by manufacturers. You can search it for the best model for your needs.

Cooking with waves

Some mid-sized microwaves can take full control — if that's what you really want.



IN A NUTSHELL

- Results for 12 medium-sized microwave ovens, from \$148 to \$349.
- Automatic and sensor functions work out the cooking time for you; whether they're worthwhile depends on how much you really cook in your microwave.

GENE BROS

Most of us mainly use microwaves as convenient defrosters and reheaters, saving time in the kitchen and allowing us to prepare meals at short notice — or even just to revive a tepid coffee or tea. However, most of the tested microwaves have a range of automatic features and four have a sensor function, so you can be more ambitious if you want to.

We compared their abilities in manual, automatic and sensor modes to defrost, cook and reheat common foods. Across all models the cooking performance ranged from very good to excellent, although ease of use is more variable.

AUTO AND SENSOR-TIVE TYPES

The range of automatic (preset) cooking/defrost/reheat programs varies from model to model. Generally you type in portion sizes (by weight) and the microwave's program works out how long to cook the food for. These auto functions can be useful if they match the foods you often cook, but otherwise can be a waste of money and touchpad space.

Sensor microwaves are even more sophisticated. They respond to vapours emitted during the cooking process and determine power and cooking time automatically. They keep sensing as cooking progresses, so you don't have to make judgments about time, weight or quantity to get the desired results.

Sensor cooking is more accurate than preprogrammed features, but there's a downside too. You don't know how long reheating or cooking will take, as the time remaining isn't displayed until the last few minutes. And if the microwave is interrupted, you have to start again, maybe ending up with overcooked food. Sometimes sensor-cooked food may not be to your personal liking, although some models have a 'more or less' feature that can give you a little more control.

All four sensor models scored very well in our cooking tests (on most manual settings as well as sensor and auto cooking) and are comparatively easy to use, so they all made it to the *What to buy* list.

INVERTER COOKING

The two PANASONIC models in our test use inverter technology, where power is supplied continuously at a certain level rather than just switching on and off throughout the cooking time. If you're cooking at 'medium', say, with conventional microwave technology you're using full power for 60% of the time and none for the other 40%. With inverter cooking you're using 60% power the whole time. The PANASONIC inverter models rated best overall in both the sensor and non-sensor categories, and both made it into the *What to buy* list.

DRIVING A MANUAL

If you only use a microwave for simple stuff and are unlikely to use automatic features even if they're there, the best manual cooking performance was found, ironically, in a sensor model — the PANASONIC The Genius Inverter (\$299). But the victory is marginal — the non-sensor PANASONIC and SAMSUNG MW123H were also excellent in manual mode, and at \$229 and \$189 respectively are a better bargain for your usage pattern.

What to buy

Models are listed in rank order within groups.



Panasonic Inverter NN-S555WF



Samsung MW123H



Sanyo EMS665W

If you only use a microwave for basic stuff (defrost, reheat, cook veggies, etc)

PANASONIC Inverter NN-S555WF	\$229
SAMSUNG MW123H	\$189
SANYO EMS665W BEST BUY	\$148
SHARP New Healthy Menu Carousel R-350J	\$252
NEC N364E	\$239

Our criteria for the above list were the inclusion of an auto defrost and auto reheat function to make using the microwave even simpler, but with no need to pay more for a sensor model. While the LG MS-324DL 32L has those functions, its \$349 price tag is over the top for a comparatively basic model.



Sharp New Healthy Menu Carousel R-350J



NEC N364E

If you do more, such as full meals, go for one of the sensor models

PANASONIC The Genius Inverter NN-S575MF	\$299
SHARP New Healthy Menu Carousel R-380J	\$285
LG MS-3443ASC (Sensor) 34L	\$299
SAMSUNG MS123HCE BEST BUY	\$249

Instead of profiles of each model in the *What to buy* list, Table 2 on page 40 gives scores for all the individual cooking tests we did. With your usage habits in mind, use it to decide which of the models in the list will best suit you.



Panasonic The Genius Inverter NN-S575MF



Sharp New Healthy Menu Carousel R-380J



LG MS-3443ASC (Sensor) 34L



Samsung MS123HCE

TABLE 1

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	PERFORMANCE			FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS	
	1 Overall score (%)	2 Cooking score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	Auto reheat	Auto defrost	Auto cook	Quick / boosted start	More / less setting (adjust auto time while cooking)	4 Power output (claimed / measured, W)	Dimensions (W x H x D, cm)
NON-SENSOR										
PANASONIC Inverter NN-555WF	83	90	67	✓	✓	✓			1100 / 1100	52 x 30 x 42
SAMSUNG MW123H	83	84	80	✓	✓	✓	✓		1000 / 1000	53 x 30 x 42
WHIRLPOOL Stainless Steel XT-30ES/55	82	86	71		✓		✓		900 / 950	53 x 31 x 46
SANYO EM5665W	81	84	73	✓	✓	✓			1000 / 950	53 x 31 x 45
SHARP New Healthy Menu Carousel R-350J	81	84	73	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1200 / 1150	52 x 31 x 42
SANYO EM5665S	80	88	60		✓		✓		900 / 900	53 x 31 x 47
LG MS-324DL 32L	79	86	64	✓	✓	✓		✓	1100 / 1000	53 x 32 x 39
NEC N364E	78	85	60	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1000 / 1000	57 x 32 x 42
SENSOR										
PANASONIC The Genius Inverter NN-5575MF	87	95	67		✓			✓	1100 / 1100	52 x 30 x 42
SHARP New Healthy Menu Carousel R-380J	85	89	76		✓	✓	✓	✓	1200 / 1100	52 x 31 x 42
LG MS-3443ASC (Sensor) 34L	83	87	74	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1100 / 1000	56 x 32 x 45
SAMSUNG MS123HCE	81	84	74	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	1000 / 950	53 x 30 x 42

What to look for

- **Size:** Microwaves come in roughly four sizes: full, family, medium (this test) and compact. Externally, don't make the fit too snug: manufacturers recommend you leave a venting space of up to 20 cm above the microwave and up to 10 cm at the sides and back.
- **Power:** The higher the wattage, the faster the food will cook. Most medium-size models are in the range 900–1200 watts. However, we've found in many tests that the claimed wattage can vary from the actual power output by up to 10%, so don't put too much faith in the numbers. The best guide is to check

the food while it's cooking and use the times quoted only as a guide.

- **Cookware:** Consider the size and type of your existing microwave cookware in relation to the turntable size and interior cavity. Will it fit? Take it to the shop with you if you're not sure.

- **Features:** Generally speaking, more features will make for a more expensive machine. Work out what's important for you in day-to-day life. How many auto programs will you use, and which ones? Features we consider genuinely useful are auto defrost, more/less setting and 'quick start'.

TABLE 2
COOKING PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order within groups)

NON-SENSOR

Brand / model	Auto defrost check score (%)
PANASONIC Inverter NN-555WF	100
SAMSUNG MW123H	90
WHIRLPOOL Stainless Steel XT-30ES/55	80
SANYO EM5665W	80
SHARP New Healthy Menu Carousel R-350J	80
SANYO EM5665S	80
LG MS-324DL 32L	60
NEC N364E	70

SENSOR

PANASONIC The Genius Inverter NN-5575MF	90
SHARP New Healthy Menu Carousel R-380J	90
LG MS-3443ASC (Sensor) 34L	50
SAMSUNG MS123HCE	90



Model	Warranty (years)**	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price (\$) [†]
1	1	China	Matsumita	229
2	1	Thailand	Samsung	189
1	1	China	Whirlpool	269
1	1	China	Sanyo	148
1	1	Thailand	Sharp	252
1	1	China	Sanyo	229
2	2	Korea	LG	349
1	1	Korea	NEC	239
1	1	China	Matsumita	299
1	1	Thailand	Sharp	285
2	2	China	LG	299
2	2	Thailand	Samsung	249

* Depth includes the handle at the front and mouldings at the back but not spacers (which prevent you from pushing the back of the microwave right up to the wall). All measurements are rounded up to the next centimetre.

** This is the basic warranty. Check the terms to see if there's extra coverage for the magnetron or an extended warranty plan.

† Prices are recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers in March/April 2006.

ns Not stated.

1 Overall score

This is made up as follows:

- Cooking score: 70%
- Ease of use score: 30%

2 Cooking score

- Manual mode: 50%
- Automatic/sensor mode: 50%

We didn't penalise microwaves that don't have particular auto/sensor functions, as different people may or may not find them useful (use the tables to check whether a model has the functions you'd use). Rather, we averaged scores for the tests that could be performed.

The tests were as follows (see Table 2 for results):

- Defrost chicken (manual and auto).
- Defrost mince (manual and auto).
- Cook broccoli (manual and auto/sensor).

■ Reheat meal (manual and auto/sensor).

- Reheat non-stirrable food, such as lasagne (manual and auto/sensor).
- Cook butter cake (manual only).

We followed the manufacturer's instructions where provided, but you may be able to get better results once you get to know your microwave.

3 Ease of use score

This was weighted as follows:

- Ease of using controls: 40%
- Ease of cleaning: 30%
- Visibility during cooking: 30%

4 Power output

We measured the power output of the ovens to compare with the manufacturer's claimed output. See *What to look for* (far left) for the significance of this.

Auto / sensor defrost score (%)	Auto / sensor cook broccoli score (%)	Auto / sensor reheat meal score (%)	Auto / sensor reheat non-stirrable food score (%)	Manual defrost chicken score (%)	Manual defrost mince score (%)	Manual cook broccoli score (%)	Manual reheat meal score (%)	Manual reheat non-stirrable food score (%)	Manual cook buttercake score (%)
60	100	na	90	100	100	100	100	52	100
na	80	na	80	87	100	100	100	72	100
na	na	na	90	100	100	80	24	100	100
na	na	na	80	100	100	100	39	100	100
100	80	na	80	100	100	100	38	80	100
na	na	na	80	100	100	100	33	100	100
100	100	na	70	100	100	100	37	90	100
100	na	na	60	100	100	100	28	90	100
100	100	100	96	90	100	100	100	66	100
100	100	100	93	80	100	100	100	46	80
100	na	na	80	100	100	100	76	90	100
100	60	na	80	75	100	100	71	100	100

na Not applicable — the microwave doesn't have this function.

For people with a disability

We assessed the suitability of the microwaves in the *What to buy* list for people with a disability, using guidelines from the Independent Living Centre (NSW).

■ Although none of the models has a handle that's especially easy to grasp, the next best option for people with hand or wrist weakness is a light-touch

pushbutton release, such as on the NEC 364E and LG MS-3443ASC.

■ Some models have better visibility when cooking than others — look for a bright light and an easy view into the oven cavity. White mesh on the door can make viewing harder. Models with better visibility included the SAMSUNG MW123H, SHARP R-380j

and R-350j, and SANYO EMS665W.

■ For people with vision problems, controls with dark colours on a light background are easier to read, and this makes reading the digital display easier too. Control panels and displays also need to have large symbols that are logically grouped and well spaced. Both SAMSUNG

models and the LG MS-3443ASC can be recommended for good colour contrast and visually easier controls.

■ For those with learning issues or cognitive or memory impairment, models that come with an information/help guide are useful, such as both SHARP models.

Mobile entertainment centre



Modern mobiles have video cameras and MP3 players, and allow you to access internet-style content on the go. Oh, and they can make phone calls too.

IN A NUTSHELL

■ On test: 49 GSM and 3G models from \$99 to \$1599.

■ Most of the tested models do their main job — taking and making phone calls — well. Which one's the best for you depends on what else you want to do with a phone, your budget, and what's available with the plan you choose.

A camera that can take photos and video is almost standard equipment on most new mobile phones. And following this trend of integrating other digital technology into phone handsets, many models now also function as an MP3 player.

We've started to pilot-test this increasingly popular function, and hope to include it in our scoring system in the not too distant future.

MAIN RESULTS

■ **Picture quality:** A digital camera is standard on most new phone models, and some of them now have two megapixels or more. While this tends to improve picture quality, the number of megapixels alone doesn't guarantee good photos if other parts of the system don't keep up (see the table, page 46, for ratings).

■ **Sound quality:** Factors such as network or atmospheric conditions can have a bigger impact on sound quality than the difference between handsets.

■ **Battery** life is keeping up well with the increasing power demands for additional features and functions, such as a large colour display.

■ **Sensitivity:** Some models can deal better with weak signals than others. If you use your phone a

lot in areas with poor coverage, look for a model with a comparatively high sensitivity score.

■ **Ease of use/ergonomics:** Basic everyday functions are usually easy enough to manage with most of the tested models. However, the phones have an increasing number of sometimes complex functions, and often the menus to access and manage them aren't very intuitive.

A small handset can be carried around more easily but also often means small keys, and some modern keypad designs have moved away from the classic key layout. Some models scored poorly in our ergonomics assessment for these reasons. So check the models you're interested in before you buy, and see what you're comfortable with.

■ **Durability:** All the tested handsets are tough — only the NOKIA 3230 and 9500 Communicator and the SONY ERICSSON Z300i sustained physical damage that affected their ability to work properly in our severe tumble test.

The phones also coped well with water and humidity (see note 9, page 45, for test details).

NETWORK UPDATE

The tested phones can be used on the Australian digital GSM networks from Telstra, Optus and Vodafone. AS GSM is also widely used overseas,

chances are you can use your mobile when you travel if you wish; this is called roaming. Check with your network provider which countries it has roaming agreements with, and what the call charges are.

All the models are at least dual-band, which means they can operate on both the 900 and 1800 MHz bands used in Australia and many overseas countries. Tri-band models can also operate on the 1900 MHz band used in the US and Canada, so these models are particularly useful if you're planning to take your mobile there. Quad-band ones in addition work on the 850 MHz band (also used in parts of the US and Canada) or the 2100 MHz 3G band. (All but the **MOTOROLA C139**, **NOKIA 6030**, **PANASONIC EB-A210**, **SAMSUNG SGH-E530** and **SONY ERICSSON Z300i** are at least tri-band.)

If you use your mobile a lot outside cities and towns in Australia, GSM may not be the best choice for you because of its limited coverage in rural and more remote areas; a CDMA phone might be a better choice. Telstra is now the only network provider for new CDMA customers, and promises about twice the coverage (geographical, not population) of its GSM network. While '3' (formerly Orange) is still operating a limited CDMA network, it won't accept any more new customers. It's aiming to move current CDMA customers to its 3G network.

All four Australian network operators (3, Optus, Telstra and Vodafone) now have 3G networks. However, the full functionality of 3G (such as video calls and access to premium content) is currently only available in major population centres such as capital cities and the Gold Coast (and for video calls to work, your calling partner needs to have a 3G phone as well, and be in a 3G area).

See the table (page 47) for which of the tested models have 3G functionality.

WHAT TO BUY

SAMSUNG SGH-D600	\$799
SONY ERICSSON K750i	\$699
SONY ERICSSON W800i	\$799

These three phones were the overall top scorers and should perform satisfactorily all-round.

In particular, the built-in cameras of the two **SONY ERICSSON** models produced the best photos (together with the **PANASONIC X800** and **SHARP 903**).

FOR SENSITIVITY

If you often use your phone in an area with poor reception, the **SAMSUNG** above scored well, while the following two models have particularly good sensitivity, but also some weaknesses (see their profiles, page 44).

MOTOROLA V635	\$599
MOTOROLA SLVR L7	\$599

Features and functions

Features in the table (see page 47):

- **Hands-free use:** Models with this feature have a speakerphone that allows you to make a call without holding the handset, such as when you're driving.
- **Voice dialling:** Allows you to record a word (such as the name of a person) together with a phone number, and to dial the number by saying that word.
- If your handset has **voice recording**, you can also record voice messages and send them on, and record voice memos and reminders.
- If you want to use your phone as a mobile office, look for a model with an **IR (infrared) port** for easy data transfer to your computer; **email** capability; and **Bluetooth** — wireless radio technology that allows a range of electronic devices, such as mobile phones, mobile phone car kits, computers and PDAs, to easily communicate with each other over a range up to 10 metres.
- **Play/record video:** Allows you to record video clips with the built-in camera, and play clips sent to you via MMS (see below).
- If you like to listen to music on the go, look for a model with a built-in **FM radio** and/or **MP3 player**. Most phones with such a function provide a **headset**. If not, check whether you can connect any other, or have to buy a specific one.
- A **memory card** allows you to store photos and video clips recorded with the phone's camera, and conveniently transfer them to a computer or printer. Not all the phones with a memory card slot also provide a card, so you may have to buy one separately.

FEATURES THE TESTED MODELS HAVE

- **Optional vibration alert** instead of ringing.
- **Keypad locking.**
- **SMS.**
- **Li-ion or Li-polymer battery**
- **Colour display.**
- **Internal antenna** (except the **MOTOROLA V635**, **NOKIA 6101** and **SAMSUNG SGH-Z140**).
- **Alarm** (except the **MOTOROLA C139**).
- **Polyphonic ring tones** (except the **MOTOROLA C139**).
- **SMS memory** in the phone in addition to that on the SIM card (except the **MOTOROLA C139**), so you can save additional messages.
- **Store additional phone numbers** and an **email address** for your contacts (except the **MOTOROLA C139** and **SONY ERICSSON Z300i**).
- **Calendar** with reminder function (except the **MOTOROLA C139** and **PANASONIC EB-A210**).
- **GPS** (except the **MOTOROLA C139**): This stands for 'general packet radio service' — it allows you access to web-like applications available over the mobile network. You can use your mobile to receive and display information on certain topics (such as the weather, sports results or the share market), buy goods or book tickets, and send and receive email. You're charged for the amount of information you download, not the time you're connected.
- **MMS compatible:** This allows you to send and receive messages with photos and/or sound (except the **MOTOROLA C139** and **PANASONIC EB-A210**).

Profiles

The models in the *What to buy* list are profiled in rank order within groups.

SAMSUNG SGH-D600

Price: \$799

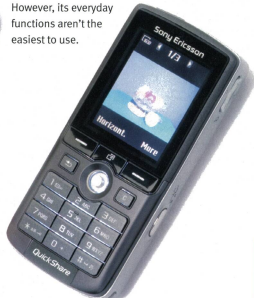
A solid performer across most aspects as well as best in the test for everyday use, with good sensitivity. It has a two-megapixel camera with digital zoom that takes pictures of above-average quality, and an MP3 player. However, its battery takes about 2.5 hours to charge.



SONY ERICSSON K750i

Price: \$699

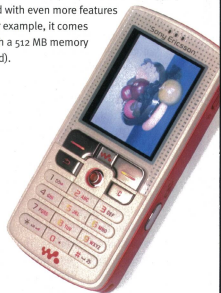
A solid performer across most aspects — comparatively long time in use (the battery takes about 2.5 hours to charge, though), and packed with features and functions. Its two-megapixel camera with zoom is one of the best in the test, and it has an MP3 player. However, its everyday functions aren't the easiest to use.



SONY ERICSSON W800i

Price: \$799

Quite similar in performance to the K750i, and with even more features (for example, it comes with a 512 MB memory card).



FOR SENSITIVITY

MOTOROLA V635

Price: \$599

The best sensitivity in the test. However, it's one of the heaviest models, its battery needs about 3.5 hours to charge, and it's not the most ergonomic handset (you may find it awkward to handle, and its menus aren't as intuitive as others).



MOTOROLA SLVR L7

Price: \$599

Very good sensitivity, slimline and lightweight. However, its camera is of comparatively poor quality, and the keypad and menus aren't the easiest to use.



PROFILES.KIT

WHAT ABOUT THE REST?

You're likely to be happy with how well most of the other tested models work if they have the features and functions you want. Which model you choose will depend on your budget and needs — and probably on which are available with the phone plan you want.

If a particular performance aspect, a specific feature or small size is essential for you, a model further down the table than the top performers, but which doesn't have a major weakness, may be the one for you. For example:

■ The models with the longest talk time using the standard battery are the **PANASONIC EB-MX6** and **NOKIA 9500 Communicator** (but this is also the heaviest model in the test). Alternatively, if long talk time is important to you, you can upgrade to a higher-capacity battery with many models.

■ If you want to use your phone as a mobile office, the **SONY ERICSSON W900i** has got the lot. However, it's not the easiest to use and is one of the heaviest models in the test.



Notes for the table, overleaf

- * Including battery and SIM card.
- ** With lid closed where applicable.
- † Recommended retail, as provided by manufacturers or taken from their website in April 2006.
- na Not applicable — no camera.
- ns Not stated.
- (A) Can play but not record video.

1 Overall score

The overall score is based on a combination of the following scores:

- Battery life: 17.5%
- Sensitivity: 14%
- Everyday use: 10.5%
- Ergonomics: 5.25%
- SMS: 10%
- Sound quality: 10.5%
- Picture quality: 10%
- Versatility: 10%
- Portability: 7%
- Durability: 5.25%

2 Battery score

This score is mainly based on the time-in-use result (see note 10), but we also considered the charging time and battery status warning.

3 Sensitivity score

We measured the phones' receiving

sensitivity and sending power (particularly important in areas with poor network coverage) in both the 900 MHz and 1800 MHz bands.

4 Everyday use/ergonomics/SMS score

A user panel assessed the following:

- Instruction manual.
- Everyday use (such as ease of answering a call, storing a number into memory and dialling a number stored in memory).
- Ergonomic features, such as the ease of using the keys and menus.
- SMS use (writing and receiving an SMS, and suitability of the display for SMSing).

5 Sound quality score

For both incoming and outgoing calls we carried out a number of acoustic measurements, such as frequency response. In addition, a user panel subjectively rated the sound quality of calls.

6 Picture quality score

Where applicable, we assessed the phone's digital camera, the display quality, and the transfer and storage

of pictures. If a phone doesn't have a camera, the score for picture quality isn't zero; instead the weighting for the picture quality score is distributed evenly across the other scores.

7 Versatility score

We checked each phone against a list of features and functions, and assessed their suitability as a mobile office and for fun and games.

8 Portability score

Among other things we assessed the weight and size of the phones, and the ease of locking and unlocking the keypad.

9 Durability score

■ **Shock resistance:** We put the phones in an 80 cm diameter barrel that was then turned, simulating falls from, say, a table or out of a shirt pocket. After five, 15 and 25 turns the phones were checked for damage. There was a maximum of 50 falls. This is a fairly severe test.

■ **Water resistance:** We stored the phones in hot, damp conditions, and carried out a rain test.

■ **Workmanship:** An assessment of the build quality of the phones.

10 Time in use

We continuously drained the batteries under various conditions in a network simulator. The time in this column is the average of all the tested scenarios.

11 Features

See *Features and functions*, page 43, for an explanation of these.

12 Camera resolution

As a comparison, new standalone digital cameras have a resolution of at least three megapixels.

13 Claimed SAR value

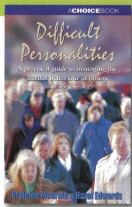
The specific absorption rate of the phone (the amount of energy per kilogram of body weight that's absorbed by the body when you're using the phone), as claimed by the manufacturer. There's currently no scientific evidence that mobile phone radiation is harmful (see CHOICE, June 2004). However, if you're concerned, you may want to choose a model with a lower SAR value.

PERFORMANCE

Brand / model (in rank order)	1 Overall score (%)	2 Battery score (%)	3 Sensitivity score (%)	4 Everyday use score (%)	4 Ergonomics score (%)	4 SMS score (%)	5 Sound quality score (%)	6 Picture quality score (%)	7 Versatility score (%)	8 Portability score (%)	9 Durability score (%)
SAMSUNG SGH-D600	68	66	75	85	63	65	66	57	66	61	69
SONY ERICSSON K750i	68	83	66	58	62	66	55	64	80	63	65
SONY ERICSSON W800i	68	84	65	56	63	65	56	63	87	63	64
NOKIA 6101	66	67	78	80	65	77	49	42	60	62	76
NOKIA 6111	66	61	79	75	62	71	55	50	69	70	61
NOKIA 6230i	66	69	70	68	59	77	53	55	75	68	63
NOKIA 6680	66	77	74	62	57	69	60	62	71	40	68
SAMSUNG SGH-E530	66	71	73	81	57	55	65	50	52	70	81
SONY ERICSSON W550i	66	79	75	53	63	65	61	52	71	48	73
MOTOROLA ROKR E1	65	73	77	68	59	64	54	50	71	56	60
MOTOROLA V635	65	65	85	69	45	68	55	55	67	53	66
NOKIA 6030	65	85	71	75	66	66	46	na	33	73	52
NOKIA 9300	65	70	72	70	56	88	56	na	62	24	68
SONY ERICSSON K600i	65	72	73	58	65	60	56	59	71	62	69
SONY ERICSSON V600i	65	72	72	56	67	60	56	59	71	63	69
MOTOROLA SLVR L7	64	73	82	68	50	64	55	41	57	67	68
MOTOROLA V360	64	70	76	67	53	64	61	40	58	60	76
NOKIA 5140i	64	64	77	73	72	68	50	42	58	63	71
NOKIA 6020	64	70	76	71	62	73	61	33	50	69	64
NOKIA N70	64	72	74	61	56	66	56	60	73	44	63
SAMSUNG SGH-X200	64	58	78	70	60	60	66	na	31	82	76
SONY ERICSSON K608i	64	72	73	52	60	61	56	58	69	65	69
MOTOROLA E770V	63	75	68	64	57	62	63	46	68	49	66
MOTOROLA RAZR V3i	63	61	70	76	42	64	53	52	62	73	80
MOTOROLA RAZR V3x	63	55	73	74	40	65	53	61	72	53	78
NOKIA 3120	63	73	68	74	55	65	54	na	31	77	62
NOKIA 7370	63	54	71	68	59	73	59	57	65	67	50
SAMSUNG SGH-Z500	63	51	66	76	55	64	63	51	70	62	84
SONY ERICSSON K300i	63	82	72	49	59	62	54	45	55	70	68
SONY ERICSSON Z520i	63	83	57	61	57	62	61	36	60	64	79
MOTOROLA PEBL U6	62	66	72	76	41	64	57	38	52	65	82
NOKIA 6670	62	72	72	56	64	69	47	58	60	46	62
NOKIA 8800	62	58	71	67	50	73	55	44	63	59	75
NOKIA 9500 Communicator	62	77	71	64	50	88	52	55	70	10	40
NOKIA N90	62	64	73	65	46	57	64	63	73	30	69
PANASONIC EB-MX6	62	77	63	65	52	68	62	49	51	44	80
SAMSUNG SGH-Z140	62	58	72	76	59	59	56	42	65	57	84
NOKIA 3230	61	61	76	59	56	69	51	61	68	50	40
PANASONIC EB-V52	61	55	67	65	55	68	60	49	50	69	84
PANASONIC EB-V53	61	55	67	65	54	79	60	47	43	68	84
PANASONIC EB-V56	61	55	67	65	56	68	60	48	51	69	84
SHARP 903	61	58	75	47	43	72	53	65	71	31	81
SONY ERICSSON W900i	61	65	70	50	51	68	57	59	78	35	63
PANASONIC X800	59	40	64	67	57	59	43	67	64	67	85
SAMSUNG SGH-X640	59	62	75	69	59	56	61	26	33	75	83
PANASONIC EB-A210	57	56	72	75	53	58	47	na	18	84	50
MOTOROLA C139	56	71	81	79	50	25	55	na	0	66	61
NEC 343i	55	57	62	69	48	64	54	18	37	78	68
SONY ERICSSON Z300i	55	67	84	53	44	46	51	na	18	68	30

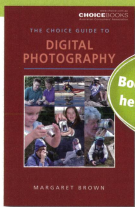
11 FEATURES													SPECIFICATIONS					
Model	Charge time (min)	Hands-free use	Voice dialling	Voice record	IR port	Email	Bluetooth	Play & record video	FM radio	MP3 player	Headset supplied	Memory card slot	3G	Weight (g)*	Dimensions (H x W x D, mm)**	12 Camera resolution (Mpx)	13 Claimed SAR value (W / kg)	Price (\$†)
147	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		104	96 x 48 x 23	2.0	0.411	799
151	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		101	100 x 46 x 22	2.0	0.66	699
160	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		100	100 x 47 x 21	2.0	0.67	799
119	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		99	86 x 46 x 24	0.31	0.82	389
77	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		92	84 x 47 x 25	1.0	0.84	529
97	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		99	103 x 45 x 21	1.23	0.70	559
103	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	136	109 x 55 x 21	1.23	0.63	789
105			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		85	86 x 42 x 28	1.0	0.762	699
130	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		121	102 x 47 x 26	1.3	0.77	499
251	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		109	108 x 47 x 21	0.31	1.01	550
220	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		126	89 x 48 x 26	1.23	0.80	599
180	✓								✓		✓			91	104 x 44 x 19	na	0.70	189
93	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	(A)		✓		✓		169	132 x 53 x 23	na	0.24	1049
130	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	105	104 x 45 x 20	1.31	0.69	699
130	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	102	104 x 45 x 20	1.3	1.62	699
165	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		99	114 x 49 x 12	0.31	0.95	599
147	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		104	90 x 48 x 25	0.31	0.72	450
77	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		101	106 x 47 x 23	0.31	0.77	359
161	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		90	106 x 44 x 20	0.31	0.52	259
92	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	130	109 x 52 x 22	2.0	0.95	919
122	✓		✓	✓	✓									78	86 x 44 x 21	na	0.74	99
130	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	101	105 x 46 x 20	1.3	0.78	699
137	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	117	111 x 47 x 22	0.31	1.04	399
118	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		96	98 x 53 x 15	1.0	0.78	750
106	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	126	99 x 54 x 20	2.0	0.98	699
285	✓													86	102 x 43 x 19	na	0.79	199
126	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		106	89 x 43 x 23	1.3	0.66	629
99	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	104	90 x 45 x 26	1.0	0.994	729
135	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		87	100 x 45 x 21	1.23	0.96	199
138	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		96	94 x 46 x 27	0.31	0.962	429
142	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		111	88 x 49 x 22	0.31	0.80	675
90	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		122	109 x 53 x 21	1.0	0.67	459
70	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		138	107 x 45 x 17	0.48	0.50	1599
119	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		230	148 x 57 x 25	0.31	0.49	1279
81	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	175	113 x 51 x 24	2.0	0.29	1199
227	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓			✓			128	97 x 47 x 27	1.31	ns	649
111	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	105	88 x 49 x 26	0.31	0.77	429
216	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	114	110 x 51 x 20	1.23	0.39	619
120	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓		97	97 x 47 x 21	1.31	0.724	549
120	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓				✓		101	96 x 47 x 21	1.31	0.862	599
120	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		98	97 x 47 x 21	2.0	0.783	699
152	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	149	109 x 50 x 29	3.2	0.87	1199
138	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	148	109 x 49 x 25	2.0	1.27	1199
107	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		98	100 x 49 x 18	0.31	ns	ns
127	✓		✓	✓										84	87 x 47 x 24	0.31	0.795	179
119	✓													69	90 x 44 x 17	na	0.549	179
214														90	101 x 46 x 22	na	0.97	99
131	✓		✓											86	106 x 44 x 13	0.31	0.606	179
193														90	86 x 46 x 27	na	0.752	189

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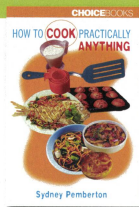
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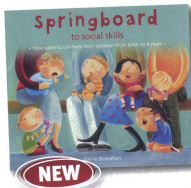
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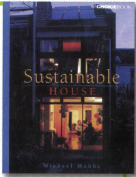
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recalls&bans

Nowadays there are so many product recalls we may not be able to print all of them in CHOICE. For comprehensive recall information go to the Product Recalls Australia website: www.recalls.gov.au. If you don't have web access, call the Product Safety Policy section of the ACCC on (02) 6243 1262.

Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after a recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

FOOD: Australian Co-Operative Foods has recalled **Cracker Barrel Extra Sharp 500 g block cheese**, best before 12 September 2006.

The problem: It may contain *Listeria monocytogenes*, which may cause illness or miscarriage in pregnant women, or illness in young children, the elderly or people with a low immune system.

What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 998 870 for more information.

FOOD: SPC Armdona Operation has recalled **IXL Raspberry Conserve: 375 g Limited Edition (tumbler)** marked with Best Before Feb 2008 03/01/06; 250 g marked with Best Before Jan 2008 14/12/05; and Collectables Disney 300 g marked with Best Before 31/02/08. They were distributed through Coles, Woolworths and Metcash.

The problem: It may contain pieces of glass.

What to do: Don't eat it. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 063 923 for more information.

FOOD: Logan Farm has recalled **New Season Fresh Frozen Mixed Vegetables**, 1 kg plastic bag, best before January 2008 B2036, distributed in NSW.

The problem: It may contain undeclared gluten (an allergen).

What to do: If you have an allergy or intolerance to gluten, don't eat it; otherwise it's safe to eat. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or call 1800 651 276 for more information.

CANDY BLOW BUBBLES: Robin Food Industries has recalled **Qifeng Edible Candy Blow Bubbles**, cotton candy flavour, 93 mL, a plastic bottle with a blow-wand inside, a best-before date of Sep 2007, and sold in NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

The problem: It contains an ingredient not permitted in this type of food, and may cause an adverse health effect in anyone who eats it.

What to do: Don't eat or use it. Anyone

concerned for their health should seek medical advice. Return it to the place of purchase for a refund, or for more information call (07) 3875 1676.

TRAMPOLINE: Target Australia has recalled **10 ft round trampoline with net enclosure**, Target product code 36582181, sold through Target stores since June 2005.

The problem: The net enclosure may deteriorate over time, resulting in tearing and a potential safety hazard.

What to do: Check the net for deterioration or tears and remove it if this has occurred. Call 1800 814 788 Monday to Friday between 9 am and 5 pm EST to arrange a replacement net enclosure, or go to www.target.com.au.

CHILDREN'S FURNITURE: Australian Discount Retail has recalled **Child's 4 piece Garden Setting**, sold through Warehouse outlets in SA between 7 November 2004 and 17 February 2006.

The problem: The chairs don't meet product safety standards as they contain entrapment hazards that may cause injury to a child's fingers.

What to do: Remove the chairs from the use of children, and return the whole setting to the place of purchase for a refund. Alternatively, you can keep the table and umbrella and return the chairs for a partial refund of \$19.99. For more information call 1800 254 687 or email merchandise.compliance@thewarehouse.com.au.

TOY: Rite Price Wholesalers has recalled **Zoom Copter**, sold through Red Dot stores in WA in 2004.

The problem: A defective securing lock for the rotor blade can break, allowing it to fly loose.

What to do: Remove it from the reach of children. Return it to your nearest Red Dot store for a refund.

FLOATIES: Rite Price Wholesalers has recalled **Inflatable Arm Bands**, reference number 63112, sold through discount variety stores in Perth between November 2005 and January 2006.

The problem: They don't meet the requirements of the Product Safety Order for the Supply of Flotation Toys and Swimming Aids.

What to do: Stop using them. Return them to the place of purchase for a refund.

FLOTATION DEVICE: Super Cheap Auto has recalled **Super Works Model PFD-1 Personal Flotation Device Type 1**, batch numbers SW001, SW002, SW003, SW004, SW005 and 0007.

The problem: The webbing doesn't comply with the specified width in the Australian standard. It may buckle during use.

What to do: Stop using it. Return it to your nearest Super Cheap Auto store for a refund, call (07) 3205 8511 for more information, or go to www.supercheapauto.com.au.

GARDEN SPRAY: Seasol International has recalled **Seasol Foliar Spray**, 750 mL trigger pack, batch number 20479, purchased after 1 November 2005.

The problem: It may contain weedkiller, which will result in damage to plants.

What to do: Don't use it. Call 1800 335 508 or go to www.seasol.com.au for more information.

MATCHES: Coles Supermarkets has recalled **Coles Reliance and Bi-Lo boxes of 45 matches in 10-packs and single packs**, with batch numbers 01.08.2005 and 05.08.2005. The single and 10-pack products were sold through Coles, Bi-Lo and Pick 'n Pay stores nationally, and the 10-pack product was also sold through Coles Online.

The problem: They don't comply with the safety standard for matches.

What to do: Return them to any Coles, Bi-Lo or Pick 'n Pay store for a refund.

TYRES: Tyres4U has recalled **LT85/75R16 Trailcutter Radial R/T** tyres, manufactured by the Cooper Tire & Rubber Company between April 2004 and November 2005 and sold through Tyres4U and its distributors

between December 2004 and February 2006. The tyres are identifiable by the serial numbers 3DYURDE1604 through 3DYURDE0306 on the sidewalls of the tyres. The tyres are likely to be fitted to 4WD vehicles, sports utility vehicles and light trucks.

The problem: There's a risk of cracking at the base of the shoulder slots, resulting in the exposure of the belt wire, which could result in a separation. This could cause the ply cords to break and the tyre to deflate.

What to do: Contact the retailer for an inspection and replacement, including fitting and balancing, or a refund. For more information call 1800 722 822 or email info@tyres4u.com.au.

CAR: Nissan Motor Company has recalled **Nissan Murano**, model R0511, VIN range JN1TANZ50A0 000007 to JN1TANZ50A0 001276; and model R0516, VIN range JN1TANZ50A0 000007 to JN1TANZ50A0 002631.

The problem: In the R0511 model, the outer rear seatbelt webbing can contact the rear seatback hinge, which could cut it, and increase the risk of injury to an occupant in the event of a collision. In the R0516, if the front tyre runs over a sharp object and it's propelled towards the rear of the vehicle, it could strike the fuel tank and damage it.

What to do: Owners of affected vehicles should be contacted by mail, or you can contact your nearest Nissan dealer to arrange for inspection and rectification.

aboutchoice

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HOW TO USE THIS INDEX

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* indicates an update of a previous report, additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, letters or recalls. For space reasons, the index generally doesn't include Choice Cuts and other small pieces.

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J Wherry is surprised that KFC would call it a con ...

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The prize for the best entry goes to R Silverberg (for the fishy wine). Thanks also to R Carton, B Drake, P Pasergio, F Shann and J Wherry for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep them coming.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries — we need the originals.